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ABSTRACT

This book offers a theoretical framework and practical guidance for creating professional learning communities in schools. It proposes to renew the capacity of the school as a whole to produce positive results for all children. Part 1, "Building Professional Learning Communities: The Cornerstones," discusses the concepts and assumptions instrumental to building school-based professional learning communities. Chapters discuss the role of collegial learning and focus on leadership qualities such as vision, values, service, capacity building and relationship building that support the building of school-based professional learning communities. Part 2, "Building Professional Learning Communities: The Process," offers practical guidance and tools for developing school-based professional learning communities. Chapters provide a framework for a school community's discovery and articulation of its identity and introduces the collaborative learning process that supports staff and families in learning together. Stages of the collaborative learning process are presented along with key questions, supporting activities, and examples. Ten tools that are relevant to building professional learning communities are presented. (Contains 74 references.) (CR)

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Realigning Our Schools

Building Professional Learning Communities

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Limited Edition

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Preface

Realigning Our Schools: Building Professional Learning Communities emerged from the work of Project REALIGN, a national model inservice training project. Funded by the U.S. Department of Education from 1995 to 1998, Project REALIGN was sponsored by The George Washington University Department of Teacher Preparation and Special Education in partnership with Fairfax County (Virginia) Public Schools. The intent of this professional development model was to deepen the capacity of adults in schools—that is, teachers, specialists, paraprofessionals, administrators, and parents—to function as powerful professional learning communities committed to creating new strategies for meeting the diverse needs of all students in their schools. Project REALIGN staff worked with approximately 150 parents, administrators, and teaching staff representing multiple roles, disciplines, and grade levels at five public elementary schools in Fairfax County, Virginia.

Over the three years of Project REALIGN a multitude of outstanding educators contributed their time, intellect, and hearts to birthing this professional development model. First, the Project REALIGN staff, a group of hard-working risk takers, weathered many a storm as we worked together to develop our ideas. Many thanks go to Andrea Sobel, Holly Blum, Elaine Barker, and Maret Wahab.

The actual writing of this book was accomplished by a wondrous team of educators. Some team members were involved in the initial conceptualization of the book and some participated in the rewriting process. All played an important part in articulating the ideas found in this book. The contributing authors are Laura Bell, Holly Blum, Amy King, Andrea Sobel, Maret Wahab, Karren Wood, and Ramona Wright. Others, such as Muriel Farley, Marianne Latall, Marie Celeste, Esther Merves, Sheryl Fahey, and Renna Jordan helped shape and refine our ideas.

Many educators in the Fairfax County Public Schools, who worked as facilitators in Project REALIGN, helped "tease out" the important elements of this model. Thank you to Wendy Boehm, Marty Brosky, Maura Burke, Karen Bump, Liz Bush, Thea Cox, Carol Flicker, Laura Freeman, Pam Pavuk, Jennifer Rose, Donna Schatz, and Jean Waylonis for their insightful questions, comments, and contributions to REALIGN.

Other communities instrumental in the development of this model were the parents, teaching staffs, and administrators at elementary schools where we piloted this professional development model—Stratford Landing, Clearview, Keene Mill, Fairfax Villa, and Hayfield. We are grateful for their dedication to quality practices, their patience, and their feedback.

Finally, we are forever indebted to our editor Ellie Abrams and her wonderful staff for their endless hours of pouring over the manuscript and crafting it into a final product. We also would like to thank our colleagues at The George Washington University Department of Teacher Preparation and Special Education Infant and Early Childhood Programs who provided a support system and cheering section for the work of REALIGN. Out of this large committed community, a budding model for professional development has emerged. We hope this book will challenge your thinking as much as it did ours.

Part I

Building Professional Learning Communities: The Cornerstones

1: Realigning for Change

Realigning Our Schools: Building Professional Learning Communities is about an emerging professional development model that supports educators and families in learning and growing together. This book offers a theoretical framework and practical guidance for creating professional learning communities in our schools that support the learning of individual members and renew the capacity of the school as a whole to produce positive results for all children.

Books don't just appear. Human desires and aspirations are forces that contribute to creating a book. The birthing of *Realigning Our Schools: Building Professional Learning Communities* was the result of several intersecting forces. First was the desire to actualize, that is, to bring into being, a school-centered, future-focused change model for schools. In this change model, the protagonists are members of the school community—parents, teachers, specialists, children, and administrators. The direction of change is future oriented with all members contributing to the explanation of who they are as a community, who they want to become, and how they can grow together.

A second force was the desire to reframe "learning" in our schools. Learning has long been the province of children in schools, yet we know that learning is as important to the life of a teacher as it is to the life of a student. Said more eloquently by Rabindranath Tragore, "A teacher can never truly teach unless she is learning herself. A lamp can never light another flame unless it continues to burn its own flame." If schools are to thrive in the 21st century, everyone in the schoolhouse must be a learner. Learning goes hand in hand with change, yet all too often schools are asked to change without giving staff the opportunity to learn.

The third desire was to offer a vehicle for educators to experience their passion for and love of teaching. Teaching is a profession of the heart. It arises from a deep calling to make a difference in the lives of children. But passions can subside and fires grow cold, especially in a climate where education has become the scapegoat for the ills of society. Michael Fullan, a well-known school reform activist, suggests that it is currently a very bleak time in the field

of education. He states, "Anyone who spends time in public schools can feel the growing, deepening malaise among educators, whether it stems from a sense on the part of teachers that the public and the government do not care about them or from an overwhelming sense of despair that the problems are insurmountable and worsening" (1997, p. 217). A process is needed that renews and empowers teachers in their work.

Finally, this book was written in the hope that the collaborative learning process will stimulate the ability of school communities to hear and act on the multiple perspectives of teachers, specialists, paraprofessionals, parents, and administrators. And out of this dialogue, new knowledge and practices will emerge that embrace the diversity of all the children attending our schools.

The Need for Change

In the quest for school improvement, change initiatives have overwhelmed the system. Several decades ago, schools might have had one initiative every year or two—mostly in the form of textbook adoptions. Now schools are struggling to coordinate multiple initiatives that are simultaneously stacked one on top of another. Each brings an answer to a problem—the technology initiative, the literacy initiative, the safe schools initiative—but together they create overwhelmed and overworked staff and a potentially fragmented education for students.

How did education decide on this additive, piecemeal approach to school improvement? This predisposition to improve things by reorganizing the pieces, adding new pieces, and taking out ineffective pieces dates back to the Newtonian mechanistic worldview of the 17th century. The Newtonian model was built on the idea that the world could be controlled like a big machine (Caine and Caine 1997). By the 1800s this mechanistic imagery had influenced not only our thinking in the sciences but also our thinking about organizations. Youngblood (1997), in *Life at the Edge of Chaos,* comments on this mechanistic perception of organizations.

> *Normally we view organizations as machines with parts that we can disassemble and reconstruct in any fashion we wish. Organizational change is frequently an exercise in moving parts around until we achieve the magic formula that produces the performance results we desire. We expect to be able to predict the outcomes of these changes and to control them completely.* (p. 76)

It is no surprise that education adopted this predictable, orderly, bureaucratic model of functioning. After all, the charge of the public education system was to provide education to the masses—a task that resembled the mass production that was going on in our factories. So our schools were divided into grade levels, with each grade assigned specific pieces of the curriculum and a teacher to teach it. When pieces of the system failed, the leaders isolated the problem and replaced the broken piece or added another piece to make the system more effective. In this way we got more curriculum, more specialists, and more supervisors.

Dramatic social, economic, and political changes have occurred since this system of education was originally conceived. Diversity, mobility, and technology have emerged as prime forces shaping our daily lives—forces that were minimal to nonexistent 50 years ago. Yet our schools are still laboring under the same bureaucratic mode of organization. What we have is an educational dinosaur, slow to move and unable to adapt, living in a world of rapid-fire change.

It is time for our system of education to change. We no longer need schools designed to educate children "en masse." We need schools that prepare our learners to lead productive lives in this complex, high-tech, and fast-changing world—schools that are responsive, fluid, and adaptive to emerging needs and opportunities. The next generation of schools must have the capacity for continuous renewal. They must have an ethos that values life-long learning for staff and families as well as students.

A New Model for Professional Development in Schools

Realigning Our Schools: Building Professional Learning Communities is about creating dynamic learning communities for the adults in our schools—communities where individual and organizational growth occur simultaneously. Two cornerstones of this professional development model are (1) schools as communities and (2) collaborative learning.

Schools as communities provide the context for growth and change—the fertile ground for growth to occur. A school community is a composite of people representing many ages, roles, backgrounds, and dreams. Members of the community are aligned around common goals, shared values, and an agreed-upon way of being and doing. This alignment of ideology forms the unique identity of community. It is from this ideological base that communities take action. It is through this community of mind that synergy arises.

Collaborative learning, the second cornerstone of this model, offers a process for simultaneously promoting individual and organizational capacity building. Collaborative learning assumes a shared focus, a shared responsibility to learn, and a disciplined approach to acquiring the desired goal. It demands that individuals shed the expert role and adopt a collaborative approach that recognizes the values, knowledge, and expertise of all community members. The collaborative learning process engages members of the community in a cycle of exploring, experimenting, and reflecting relative to a specific outcome. The knowledge and skills that are generated through collaborative inquiry enriches the knowledge base of the school. From this bank of knowledge and expertise, improved programs and services are born.

The concepts of "schools as communities" and "collaborative learning" interact like an ever-expanding web (see figure 1). The core of the web contains the school community's values, visions, and ways of relating. Collaborative learning represents the potential for growth and capacity building. Multiple opportunities for collaborative learning exist within a community. Community members are free to self-organize around topics of interest to them, yet they are guided by their community's core ideology. The result is a professional learning community connected by shared values and visions while nourished by high levels of energy and forward movement emanating from the work of multiple, self-organized collaborative learning groups.

Figure 1: **Building Professional Learning Communities**

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Organization of This Book

Realigning Our Schools: Building Professional Learning Communities describes an emergent model of professional development—a model where learning becomes a way of life for educators as well as children; where collaboration among teachers, parents, and administrators is key to creating positive results for all children; and where leadership relies on vision, values, and relationships. Professional development literature reports the positive impact of professional learning communities on teacher resiliency and student learning. Yet knowledge about how to support the emergence of professional learning communities is rudimentary. Our goal in this book is to offer readers a beginning theoretical framework and practical guidance for thinking about why and how to build professional learning communities in their schools.

Part I. Building Professional Learning Communities: The Cornerstones

This section of the book orients the reader to concepts and assumptions that are instrumental to building school-based professional learning communities. This first chapter, "Realigning for Change," provides the rationale for this work and introduces the key ideas and concepts discussed in the book. Chapter II, "Learning Communities: An Ethos for Professional Change," discusses the role of collegial learning as a renewing force in schools during times of change. The active-interactive learning community approach to professional development is compared with the more traditional "expert" training approach. Emerging assumptions and a conceptual frame for professional learning communities are presented. Chapter III, "Leading Professional Learning Communities," focuses on leadership qualities that support the building of professional learning communities in our schools. The leadership qualities of vision, values, service, capacity building, and relationship building are explored along with snapshots of school leaders in action.

Part II. Building Professional Learning Communities: The Process

This section offers the reader practical guidance and tools for developing school-based professional learning communities. Chapter IV, "Identity of the Learning Community," provides a framework that supports a school community in discovering and articulating its identity. A natural alignment occurs within a community when its members have a clear sense of who they are collectively and where they are going. This chapter presents a rationale and strategies for exploring the many dimensions of a school community's identity, including its history, core purpose and values, current reality, and shared vision. Chapter V, "Learning as a Community," introduces the collaborative learning process—a process that

supports staff and families in learning together. This chapter offers guidance on how to identify topics of study and form collaborative learning groups. Stages of the collaborative learning process are presented along with key questions, supporting activities, and examples. Chapter VI, "Enhancing Capacity to Learn," highlights the interpersonal side of collaborative learning; discusses group behaviors that help build a bond of trust, belonging, and purposefulness; and focuses on tools and techniques that support group members in communicating and working effectively with each other. Chapter VII, "Tools for Learning," presents 10 tools that are relevant to building professional learning communities. Many are multipurpose tools and can be modified according to the needs of the group. The description of each tool includes its purpose, step-by-step directions, and tips for debriefing and adapting the process.

Final Thoughts

Realigning Our Schools: Building Professional Learning Communities does not dwell on fixing current problems in our schools, but rather on creating a new future for school communities. John Gardner in *Self-Renewal* (1964) underscores the need for this future-focused approach to organizational renewal:

> *No society is likely to renew itself unless its dominant orientation is to the future. There is a readily discernible difference between the society that is oriented to the future and the one that is oriented to the past. Some individuals and societies look forward and have the future ever in mind, others are preoccupied with the past and are antiquarian in their interests. The former have a vivid sense of what they are becoming, the latter a vivid sense of what they have been. The former are fascinated by the novelty of each day's experience, the latter have a sense of having seen everything.* (p. 105)

With this work, we are forging into the future and invite you to join us in this collaborative learning adventure.

Penelope Wald, Project Director for Project REALIGN, The George Washington University, Department of Teacher Preparation and Special Education, wrote this chapter.

II: Learning Communities—An Ethos for Professional Change

This chapter introduces a new paradigm for professional development—a paradigm bounded by principles of collegiality, inquiry, learning, and community. Teacher researchers, professional learning communities, and schools as centers of inquiry are all phrases born of this new paradigm. After reviewing the structure and assumptions underlying the traditional training approach to professional development, this chapter examines the concepts and a set of emerging assumptions that support an approach in which schools are learning communities for educators and parents as well as for children.

During my 25 years as an educator, I have focused on one thing—the mastery of the content I need to teach. I am certain that if I know the content well enough, then I can deliver it in a way that anyone and everyone can learn the information. I work very hard to master the content in all my subject areas. To learn new content, I leave my school (after a full day of work or after writing a full day of lesson plans) to attend a training workshop, a conference, or a course. Most often I attend training sessions where experts in the subject area have a limited amount of time to transfer all their knowledge about the subject to me and 100 other teachers. They may use a lecture approach combined with demonstrations and guided practice during the training session. After attending the event, I return to my classroom, shut my door, try the new stuff with my kids, and, if I am diligent, make adjustments based on feedback to myself. Seldom do I receive a follow-up call from the district staff development office, on-site coaching from the trainer, or even a "how's it going" from the building administrator. Sometimes I just give up if the new approach doesn't seem to be working. Most often, I am off to another workshop to hear about something else new before I have a chance to really think through and use what I last "learned."

This scenario may seem fictitious, but it is a fairly realistic description of the traditional training approach to professional development. Harrison (1995) describes "training" as the process

for transferring to the employee the knowledge and skills that the organization has decided the employee needs to know. That definition is fairly consistent with what happens in education. The state, the district, or the building administrator determines the knowledge and skills a teacher needs to know and provides training to impart that knowledge to the teacher. The teacher then is responsible for delivering the information to the students. And, finally, the students are graded on how much they absorb. That's the training food chain.

The traditional training approach typifies the modus operandi for inservice programs in many school districts across the country. It assumes that professional development is effective and efficient when (1) planned and delivered by the school district; (2) conducted in large groups at off-site training events; and (3) led by experts who transmit knowledge, skills, and strategies to selected staff. Yet its ability to prepare staff to meet the increasing demands in education is becoming more and more questionable. The 1996 National Foundation for Improvement in Education publication, *Teachers Take Charge of Their Learning,* enumerates the long list of demands on educators.

> *Today's teachers must be sensitive to varying social demands and expectations; must be able to diagnose and address the individual learning and development needs of students, including special emotional, physical, social and cognitive needs; must be able to use information technologies in all aspects of their work; must make important decisions about what and how much to teach of the overwhelming amount of new knowledge being created in every field; and must reach out more effectively to parents and the community than ever before.* (p. xiv)

During the past decade, education literature has promoted a new set of staff development practices, such as teacher inquiry, action research, professional collaboration, and learning communities to help educators meet these rising expectations. Much of the writing contains sharp contrasts between the traditional training approach and the "next generation" of practices. An excerpt from Sergiovanni's *Leadership for the Schoolhouse* (1996) offers an example.

> *Few axioms are more fundamental than the one that acknowledges the link between what happens to teachers and what happens to students. Inquiring classrooms, for example, are not likely to flourish in schools where inquiry among teachers is discouraged. A commitment to problem solving is difficult to instill in students who are taught by teachers for whom problem solving is not allowed. Where there is little discourse among teachers, discourse among students will be harder to promote and maintain. The idea of making classrooms into learning communities for students will remain more rhetoric than real unless schools become learning communities for teachers too.* (p. 139)

The question then becomes, How are we going to get from the traditional training approach to one that embraces schools as learning communities for educators? To understand the path to this new paradigm, we first need to become familiar with the key assumptions that underlie the concepts of "learning" and "community."

Looking at Adult Learning

Creating a professional development system that supports school improvement and professional renewal must be grounded in sound assumptions of adult learning (Loucks-Horsley 1995). Many times we act as if learning as an adult happens as a direct result of exposure to new information; as if at the moment of hearing new information, we "learn" it. Learning is much more complex than that, especially when the goal of learning is to build the capacity of the individual or the system. This section presents five assumptions about adult learning that are foundational to the building of professional learning communities.

Assumptions about Adult Learning

Assumption 1: Inquiry into underlying assumptions deepens the learning process.
Assumption 2: Learning is an active process that occurs over time.
Assumption 3: Learning is driven by the learner around meaningful issues.
Assumption 4: Learning is experimental by nature.
Assumption 5: Learning is fueled by rich, diverse, accessible sources of information.

Assumption 1

Inquiry into underlying assumptions deepens the learning process.

Since Dewey first distinguished between thinking and rote learning, multiple learning theorists have elaborated on the claim that there are different kinds of learning. Senge (1990) describes two types of learning: adaptive and generative learning. Adaptive learning has three main steps: (1) a problem is encountered, (2) solutions are identified, and (3) solutions are applied. The adaptive model operates from a set of assumptions, beliefs, and interpretations. These assumptions form a box or framework for viewing the problem. Within this framework, a discrete number of solutions are possible. The inquiry centers around the question, What should we do? The solution relies on our ability to recall past solutions and apply them to the present situation. It is a process of "recollecting" and "reapplying" information.

Generative learning emphasizes a creative, "out-of-the-box" approach to thinking and learning. It begins the same way as adaptive learning—a problem is encountered. But rather than

jumping into action with the question, What should we do? we slow down and ask, Why is this a problem? or What do we believe or assume that makes this a problem? This new question leads us to look at the assumptions or way of thinking that created the problem, and challenges us to reconsider the validity of those assumptions.

A Situation from Two Perspectives

Johnny is doodling while his teacher, Ms. Adaptive, is introducing a new science concept. Doodling during a lecture is a problem for her. She decides to discuss it with Ms. Generative. "I'm having a problem with Johnny doodling during my science lectures; I think I should take his pencil away." *This is an example of a problem-solution or adaptive-learning approach. Doodling is the problem and removing the stimulus, the pencil, is the solution.*

Ms. Generative suggests, "Let's not jump to a solution. Let's think about why we consider Johnny's doodling a problem."

"Because doodling distracts children from learning," replies Ms. Adaptive. *That's the assumption that created the problem. Now the assumption is out in the open, and the teachers are able to discuss it.*

"Is it true that doodling interferes with learning?" asks Ms. Generative. She continues, "Maybe, maybe not. It may help Johnny to focus. Rather than ignore what might be his learning style, we could help him learn to doodle more purposefully, using graphic webbing to represent what is being said. What other ideas could we come up with if we operated from the assumption that doodling is NOT a problem?" *This is an example of generative thinking—an examination of the problem at the assumption level, not the action or solution level.*

Inquiry into the assumptions and beliefs that create the problem is an essential element of generative learning. Daniel Kim (1994) maintains that we don't realize that our problems occur in the context of our assumptions. For example, being unmarried is a problem when the predominate assumption is that people who are not married must be uninteresting and unattractive. It is not a problem when the predominate assumption is that the best and brightest people tend to be unmarried. In schools, 30 children in a class is a problem when the predominant assumption is that one teacher has the sole responsibility for the education of all 30 children. This may not be a problem if the predominate assumption is that a class of 30 students has two teachers and a double-sized classroom. Once we realize that people view information differently because they operate from different beliefs and assumptions (what is a problem to one person may be a blessing to another), we can work at seeing the situation from different perspectives. In this way, we open up new ways of thinking and acting.

In education, the capacity for generative learning greatly enhances professional development. The inquiry approach, with its emphasis on examining the relationship between the-

ory and practice, supports the generative learning process. Darling-Hammond (1998) argues that quality professional development is "centered around the critical activities of teaching and learning; grows from investigations of practice; and is built upon substantial professional discourse" (p. 323). It is becoming more and more obvious that the professional development models in the 21st century will draw upon the skills of inquiry and generative thinking (Hirsh and Sparks 1997; Sagor 1995).

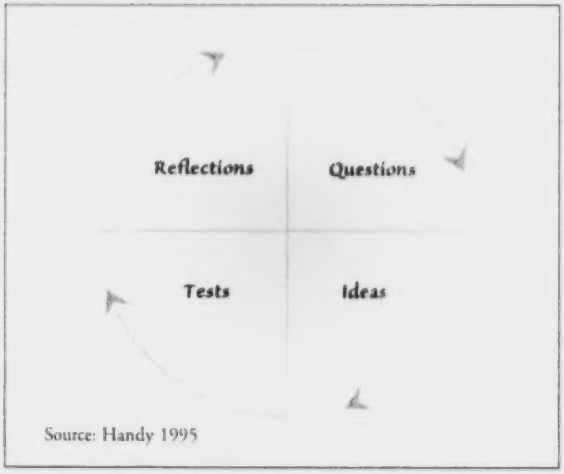
ASSUMPTION 2

Learning is an active process that occurs over time.

Learning involves a constant movement back and forth between thinking and action (O'Neill 1995). The learner not only hears and processes the information but also experiments with it and then documents and reflects on the results. The learning process has been described by Handy (1995) as a cyclical process in which the learner is actively involved in questioning, developing ideas, testing, and reflecting. Handy describes the process as the "wheel of learning." The learner moves sequentially through the four quadrants of the wheel of learning:

- A problem that needs a solution triggers the asking of questions.
- Ideas that answer the question are gathered and the most feasible idea is selected.
- This idea is tried out or tested.
- The results are reflected upon to decide if the idea is a satisfactory solution to the problem.

Figure 2: ***Wheel of Learning***



Source: Handy 1995

The wheel of learning substantiates the importance of on-the-job learning opportunities. Learning occurs when new ideas are actually tried. The place for that to happen is on the job. "The learning that teachers need from each other is learning that continues throughout the day, the school year, and the career. It is the constant improvement of practice based on observation, feedback, reflection, evaluation, and concerted effort to try again with something new" (NFIE 1996, p. 34-5).

ASSUMPTION 3

Learning is driven by the learner around meaningful issues.

The motivation to learn begins inside oneself with a need or a question. Engaging in learning emerges from an intrinsic desire to know. When learning starts from within the learner, it becomes a generative process in which the learner seeks to create something new—to bring an idea or a strategy into being.

Sergiovanni's (1996) renewal approach to professional development capitalizes on the teacher's personal need to know and commitment to excellence, rather than on external goals. In this approach, professional development is driven by intrinsic forces rather than by external ones. When considering this staff-centered approach to teacher development, Bolin (1987) asks,

> *What would happen if we set aside the question of how to improve the teacher and looked instead at what we can do to encourage the teacher? Asking how to encourage the teacher places the work of improvement in the hands of the teacher. It presupposes that the teacher desires to grow, to be self-defining and to engage in teaching as a vital part of life.* (p. 11)

Systems are needed that empower staff to define their professional path and grow in ways that are meaningful in their work with students.

ASSUMPTION 4

Learning is experimental by nature.

Learning requires a degree of initiative and risk taking in the face of uncertainty. It is experimental by nature. The learner must be patient and forgiving because learning is a trial-and-error process, and mistakes are inevitable. There are many obstacles to learning, especially for adult learners. One is the fear of being viewed as incompetent by one's peers. Continuing to flounder is often less threatening than turning to colleagues for help. Embarrassment is often associated with learning as an adult. When we lack knowledge, we are often left feeling stupid and vulnerable. Or there may be the fear of reprisal from "higher" positions if incompetencies are identified or mistakes are made. Ironically, many of these risk-avoidance behaviors were learned from our experiences in schools. Creating environments where our fears won't be reproduced in our students is important.

In teaching, there is also a bias for action. Once a problem is identified, a solution is immediately sought. Time for exploring and reflecting is often lost in the push to act. Courage

and willpower are required for an individual or a group to slow down and look more completely at the problem, at the assumptions behind the problem, and at the desired results.

ASSUMPTION 5

Learning is fueled by rich, diverse, and accessible sources of information.

> *For a system to remain alive...information must be continually generated. The fuel of life is new information.... If there is nothing new or if the information that exists merely confirms what is, the result will be death.* (Wheatley 1992, p. 104-5)

A vital learning environment offers a richness of resources. The resources come in multiple forms and can be accessed in multiple ways. Colleagues, experts, literature, and technology present different options that appeal to different learning styles. In this new professional development paradigm, information flows in many directions. In addition to the traditional expert-to-learner flow of information, opportunities exist for the expert to learn from the learner and for the learners to learn from each other and from their own inner knowing.

The traditional training approach described in the beginning of this chapter is one method for providing staff with useful, relevant information about current education issues. As a method of disseminating information, it has a permanent place in the staff development protocol. Yet other rich and diverse sources of information can be found inside and outside the school walls. The new professional development paradigm suggests that a strong predisposition must exist within a school for sharing know-how and ideas among staff, for discussing success and failures, and for supporting each other in experimenting and reflecting. Going outside the school affords staff opportunities to visit exemplary programs; network with other teachers; access consultants and university faculty; and tap into multiple forms of technology, such as video, computer, and telecommunications. This inside-outside approach to gathering information provides a balance between germinating the seeds within the school and cross-pollinating among schools and programs to stay connected and avoid the rigidity of thinking that often occurs when schools become too insular in their approach.

Contemplating Community

> *We apply [the term community] to almost any collection of individuals—regardless of how poorly those individuals communicate with each other. It is a false use of the word. If we are going to use the word meaningfully, we must restrict it to a group of individuals who have learned how to communicate honestly with each other, whose relationships go deeper*

> *into their masks of composure, and who have developed some significant commitment to rejoice together, mourn together, delight in each other, and make others' conditions our own.* (Peck 1987, p. 59)

Communities are "collections of individuals who are bounded together by natural will and who are together bound to a set of shared ideas and ideals. This bounding and binding is tight enough to transform them from a collection of 'I's' to a collective 'we'" (Sergiovanni 1996, p.48). When we apply the concept of community to schools, the focus shifts from school structure to school culture, from ways of organizing to ways of being, from brick and mortar to ideals and relationships. Fullan (1998) argues that school reform has failed because of the focus on restructuring schools, that is, changing the ways schools are organized to improve teaching and learning. Hoping to find the right answer, schools have continuously adopted the latest curriculum and instructional delivery formulations, leaving staff exhausted by change and often still facing the original problems. Fullan advises us to look instead to the reculturing process—the changing of the norms, values, and relationships in our schools—as a more expedient way to improve teaching and learning. He believes that fostering a more collaborative, collegial workplace among teachers will positively impact student outcomes. Rather than having new structures drive the change process, a change in culture toward a more collaborative, community-minded way of being together will dictate the necessary organizational changes in schools. Examining assumptions underlying the concept of a community illuminates how a professional development approach focused on school culture rather than school structure could impact our schools.

Assumptions about Community

Assumption 1: A shared philosophy bonds a community.
Assumption 2: A community is a web of diverse relationships.
Assumption 3: A community provides the context for the emergence of unpredictable potential.

Assumption 1

A shared philosophy bonds a community.

One of the most important actions for a school community is to develop a shared philosophy—an agreed-upon statement about child development, learning, and important outcomes for children. This shared philosophy (1) serves as a concrete document that guides

the actions of all members of the school community—teachers, administrators, parents, and students—and (2) offers the school community a collective strength of mind and spirit. According to Saphier and D'Auria (1993), "The collective power of a school faculty united behind a few important commonly prized outcomes for students is virtually unlimited" (p. 3). A shared philosophy gives a school community a strong sense of identity and continuity in times of change. This philosophy is the compass for the school.

Shared purpose and values do not emerge out of a vision-building exercise or even a two-day faculty retreat. A school works at articulating and actualizing its most deeply felt beliefs over time. This process requires continual vigilance. Vigilance is present when purpose and values guide the ongoing conversations in the schoolhouse—when alignment exists between the day-to-day decisions and a community's expressed beliefs. Shared purpose and values serve to enhance the cohesiveness among staff, connect the school community to its higher purpose, and reenergize staff when the going gets rough.

Revisiting the school's philosophy is essential as staff members grow together and probe deeper into the beliefs that guide their actions.

> *As we act together...our identity grows and evolves. It helps periodically to question what we have become.... Do we each organize our work from the same shared sense of what is significant? Such an inquiry helps return us to the energy and passion of that space of early vision. We return to the place where our community took form.* (Wheatley and Kellner-Rogers 1996, p. 62)

Purpose and values are matters of the heart. As we come to discover more of who we are, our purpose and values become more visible in our words and actions. They become the organizer of our community. Our structure evolves from our purpose and values.

Assumption 2

A community is a web of diverse relationships.

> *When we reach into the most fundamental basis of our being, we find a pregnant void, a web of relationships. When somebody asks us to talk about ourselves, we talk about family, work, academic background, sports affiliations, etc. In all this talk, where is our "self"? The answer is nowhere because the self is not a thing, but...a narrative striving to connect with other narratives and become richer.* (Kofman and Senge 1993, p. 14)

Margaret Wheatley in *Leadership and the New Sciences* (1992) suggests that we only exist in relationship to another person or idea. The constitution of the self happens in relationship, and relationship is at the heart of a community. Communities support certain ways of being and discourage others. As we work to build vital communities in our schools, the way we regard one another matters. Do we see each other as human beings brimming with possibility and potential or as part of an assembly line? The work of a community is to affirm who we are as individuals and who we can become together. We are gifts to one another. Our diversity adds richness to what we can offer each other. In schools, the work of the community begins when staff are able to meet face to face and identify the unique gifts and talents that each person brings to the situation. When staff from different classrooms, grade levels, and specialties come together, misunderstandings can be addressed; a commonality of vision, goals, and practices emerges; and synergy of thought and action is ignited.

To thrive on the diversity, community members must be able to effectively probe into each other's thinking. A community rich with diversity must be skilled at transforming controversy into a deeper understanding of the problem or issue at hand. Stephanie Ryan (1995) eloquently expresses the potential of diversity within a community. "The sense of community—where an appreciation of inter-relatedness, our wholeness, allows for differences to be expressed and transcended graciously—offers fertile ground for learning and collaboration" (p. 289). Communities are webs of diverse relationship. The health of the community is reflected in how it welcomes and nurtures the expression of its diversity.

Assumption 3

A community provides the context for the emergence of unpredictable potential.

> *Emergence is the surprising capacity we discover only when we join together.... We witness emergence any time we are surprised by a group's accomplishments or by our own achievements within a group.* (Wheatley and Kellner-Rogers 1996, p. 67)

Community as a context for the emergence of unpredictable potential demands that each member be committed to high personal standards, lifelong learning, and the work of the community. All members are accountable for their contribution to the whole and have a sense of the relationship between themselves and the whole. Like the musician, members of the community are expected to be masterful in their own right while at the same time mindful of their role and the role of the others in creating the dynamic potential of the whole.

Powerful communities are formed when individuals realize they *need* one another to accomplish their work. They cannot accomplish the work alone. Members of these communities are characterized as "critically dependent on each other...where collaborative learning is not just nice but necessary to survival. This interdependence promises an atmosphere of joint responsibility, mutual respect, and a sense of personal and group identity" (Brown 1994, p. 19). This sense of interdependency feeds the potency of the collective. A community that sets extraordinary challenges for itself—challenges that no one person can handle alone and that require the discipline and commitment of each member—begins to radiate a new sense of energy and power.

Learning communities in schools harness the collective energy of staff for growth and change. The accomplishments of teachers working as individuals, good as they may be, pale in comparison to the accomplishments of a united faculty. It is like the difference between a bunch of good basketball players and an outstanding basketball team. The synergy that emerges from groups of teachers learning together and helping one another holds great potential for both improving student outcomes and creating a caring, nurturing environment among the staff (Joyce and Calhoun 1995). The following statements, extracted directly from school reform literature, express the power of professional collaboration available to our schools.

> *Collaborating staff...relish opportunities to share ideas about teaching. They learn to appreciate the collegial interdependencies in ways that reach deep into the heart of their schools and classrooms and perceive individual and group risk-taking as learning opportunities.* (Uhl 1995, p. 258)

> *Teachers' participation in a professional community of like-minded colleagues had a powerful effect on their ability to know better what to do in the classroom and to adapt their teaching strategies to more effectively meet student needs. Where such collegiality is high, teachers have more positive views of teaching and teach more successfully.* (McLaughlin and Talbert 1993 cited in Sergiovanni 1996, p. 140)

The concept of community speaks of shared philosophy, networks of relationships, and synergy. It is a living, breathing context for organizing—a context where people, not tasks, occupy center stage. The concept of community offers a new place to start when creating a culture that supports the growth of educators.

Final Thoughts

Literature offers definitions of learning communities that call forth our lofty and poetic side. For example, Kofman and Senge (1993) picture learning communities as "spaces for generative conversations and concerted action [where] people can talk from their hearts and connect with one another in the spirit of dialogue. Their dialogue weaves a common ongoing fabric and connects them at the deep level of being. When people talk and listen to each other this way, they create a field of alignment that produces tremendous power to invent new realities in conversation and bring about these new realities in action" (p. 16).

To some, this description may be inspirational. To others, it may be too idealistic. Regardless of what we think about the concept of learning community, we know the professional development compass is pointing in the direction of increased collegiality, collaboration, and ongoing inquiry. Fullan (1993), a leader in school reform, heralds in this new era with these words:

> *The future of the world is a learning future.... It is a world where we will need generative concepts and capacities. What will be needed is the individual as inquirer and learner, mastery and know-how as prime strategies...teamwork and shared purpose which accepts both individualism and collectivism as essential to organizational learning.* (p. vii)

The traditional training approach is no longer the answer. Consensus is building around the notion that effective teaching in the 21st century will require "teachers, school administrators, and communities to join together to make all schools learning organizations and all teachers learners" (NFIE 1996, p. xii). Professional learning communities have the potential to be a major catalyst in transforming the teaching-learning process because teachers, as members of a learning community, can experience learning in the same ways that their children should experience learning. The concepts and assumptions associated with learning and community discussed in this chapter are equally applicable for teachers as they are for children. In this new paradigm, as we reflect on ourselves as learners in a larger community, we will better understand how our children feel as learners in similar situations. We will have new insights about cooperative learning in heterogeneous groups, learner-centered teaching, and the inquiry-based approach to learning because we will have had the experience firsthand as part of a learning community. We will be active participants in a world that is a learning world for everyone. And we will be all the wiser for it.

Penelope Wald, Project Director for Project REALIGN, The George Washington University, Department of Teacher Preparation and Special Education, wrote this chapter.

III: Leading Professional Learning Communities

A weaver is intrigued by an opportunity to create a tapestry that represents the varied qualities of leadership. To begin the intricate tapestry, the weaver carefully selects thread colors: bright orange for commitment, deep green for relationships, mustard yellow for trust, and ripe red for collaboration. With nimble fingers, the weaver adds a sea blue thread for values and a steel gray thread for service. Carefully woven into the pattern, each thread contributes beautifully to the increasing complexity of the tapestry. The combination of all the colors is inspiring to all who behold it. Lastly, a thread of black is woven around the perimeter of the tapestry. This sum of all colors represents the vision that frames and links each of the colors.

The tapestry is a holistic image of quality leadership. No formula or exact proportions of colors are suggested. Each tapestry of leadership created by the weaver represents a leader's unique blend and arrangement of qualities. While literature has documented that all of these qualities are elements of inspiring and effective leadership, this chapter focuses on the five qualities of leadership that we found critical to building and sustaining professional learning communities in schools: vision, values, service, capacity building, and relationship building. Each quality will be revealed through discussion and a snapshot of a leader in action.

Past, Present, and Future

> *Time present and time past*
> *Are both present in time future*
> *And time future contained in time present.*
>
> T. S. Eliot

Over the years many schools have functioned under a hierarchical, command-and-control model of leadership that evolved during the industrial revolution. This era valued efficiency, predictability, control, and uniform mass production of goods, all of which became the earmarks of a successful organization and its leadership. The roles and actions of school leaders

were, for the most part, congruent with the purpose of these 20th century industrial age schools: to systematically, uniformly, and efficiently provide students with the knowledge and skills necessary to function effectively in an industrial, democratic society.

As we enter the 21st century, our schools must continue to prepare our children to become productive citizens in a democratic society, and at the same time we must remember that we no longer live in the industrial age. We now live in a technologically sophisticated information age in which knowledge, not goods, is the prize product; fast-paced change, not stability, is the status quo; and futures are created, not predicted. For example, as recently as 1968, change was perceived as a predictable event; and now, just 30 years later, this view of change is significantly altered. Experience has taught us that change is a continuous journey.

In *What Matters Most: Teaching for America's Future* (1996), The National Commission of Teaching and America's Future gives us this warning:

> *There has been no previous time in history when the success, indeed the survival of nations and people, has been so tied to their ability to learn. Today's society has little room for those who cannot read, write, and compute proficiently; find and use resources; frame and solve problems; and continually learn new technologies, skills, and occupations. Every school must be organized to support powerful teaching and learning.* (p. 3)

To approach this challenge in this new age, we need leaders of school communities who are committed to continuous schoolwide learning and growing. We need leaders who can challenge both students and professionals and can transform our schools into powerful learning communities.

Building vital professional learning communities in schools asks the leader to perform a multitude of complex roles; these roles attend as much to realizing potential and creating relationships at both the individual and organizational level as they do to producing results. In much the same way as a painter carefully combines the colors of the palate to create a background from which the painting emerges, the leader creates a culture that serves as the setting for the emergence of a vital professional learning community. The role of the leader as culture builder carries new responsibilities that often read more like poetry than like a traditional job description:

- Creates sparks, marshals forces, tends fires, and celebrates victories.
- Believes in and releases the potential of followers.
- Unites dynamic and diverse communities for the good of the whole.

We acknowledge that many forms of leadership exist within schools. For the purpose of this conversation, the school leader is the designated site-based leader, such as the director, headmaster, or principal. We are also making several assumptions about leadership for building professional learning communities in schools:

- The leader lives by and models deeply held values and beliefs. Keshavan Nair, in his book, *Lessons From the Life of Gandhi* (1994), concludes, "leadership by example is not only the most pervasive but also the most enduring form of leadership" (p. 140). We assume quality leaders "walk the talk" in every aspect of their work.
- The leader is well-grounded in his or her sense of self. In *The Tao of Leadership* (1985), John Heider states this assumption simply but eloquently, "I know where I stand and I know what I stand for: that is ground" (p. 51). It is impossible to lead others in meaningful conversations about the future, about deeply held beliefs, about relationships, and about learning without self-understanding.
- Change efforts are more successful when they emanate from within the school community and are supported by its leader. Staff attitudes and actions about change, innovation, and professional learning are significantly influenced by the principal's disposition.

With these assumptions in mind, we will highlight the five critical qualities of leadership and their attendant actions.

Vision

In *Leading Without Power* (1997), Max DePree draws a distinction between vision and sight: "We can teach ourselves to see things the way they are. Only with vision can we begin to see things the way they can be" (pp. 116-17). DePree is describing the future-focused quality of leadership that is essential in creating a meaningful context for action in learning communities. Future-focused leadership is the ability to look beyond the present circumstances and conjure an image of the future that recognizes and responds to the need for change. A community that has a future-focused culture talks about what's possible and what new opportunities are available, not what's wrong or what needs to be fixed.

The school vision is not solely the brainchild of the school leader but rather is borne out of a community's conversation regarding the question, What do we want to become? School leaders share their image and invite all members of the school community to verbalize their hopes and dreams for the future of the children in their school. The conversation focuses on

Case Study on Vision: Westlake Elementary School

Westlake Elementary School with its 350 students and 22 staff members is part of a large school district that serves 110,000 students. The school staff is characterized by an attitude of acceptance of all the children in the school. For several years, Westlake Elementary has successfully served its own student population with learning disabilities (LD) as well as the increasing number of students with limited English proficiency (LEP) who have joined the school community. In addition, during this school year, two students have become eligible for special education services for the emotionally disabled, and one student has been diagnosed as mildly mentally retarded. As this school year closes, the staff is preparing for the next one. They are anticipating that most of their kindergarten students with LEP will attend a special center at another school and that the students with disabilities will transfer to schools with appropriate disability programs.

At a school faculty meeting, a first grade teacher suggests that the students with LEP stay at Westlake, their own community school. The school speech and language pathologist offers to support the primary teachers in adapting curriculum for students with LEP. The principal (Ms. Gray), the LD teacher, and the second and third grade teachers are all interested in exploring ways in which they can serve the three students identified for special education in their classrooms so that these students can remain at Westlake with their siblings. At a meeting, Ms. Gray asks her staff, "Are we ready to begin a journey to become an inclusive school in which all children are welcome and all children can learn?"

The speech and language pathologist comments that as the school's population becomes more diverse, staff want to learn more about new student groups and how to meet their needs. A second grade teacher volunteers that she has enrolled in a minicourse on working with parents from other cultures.

Most of the staff agree that they would like to pursue the possibility of inviting these students to remain at Westlake and plan to create teams to further discuss their commitments to children and families.

Many of the staff also express a common commitment to the children and families they serve. As the discussion progresses, several additional staff become interested in other possibilities and express a willingness to explore and learn together. Ms. Gray is creating opportunities for her staff to begin a journey toward a vision.

■ **This case study demonstrates that leaders can share with their teaching staff an image of the future that is different from the current reality and is respectful of their beliefs, needs, and interests. The staff will become engaged in further creating that vision and become committed to learning processes to create a new reality.**

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communicating ideas; listening to each other; and discovering, nurturing, and articulating a vision that is inspiring and compelling to everyone. Teachers whose hopes and dreams have dimmed as a result of their teaching experiences will need help in restoring their visions. Future-focused leaders work with disappointed teachers and help them rediscover their reason for entering the teaching profession.

A vision becomes the community's road map to the future: it connects dreams and aspirations, offers hope for a different future, and bonds diverse people and their perspectives. To sustain this communal energy and hope, the leader must hold the vision high for all to see, constantly revisit it, expand upon it, and continuously help members of the community connect with it and find ways to personalize it and make it their own. The goal is to unite people through a mutually held vision and then support the people in changing the vision into a reality. Peter Senge says, "leadership is ultimately about creating new realities" (1996). We agree. To us, a powerful leader inspires dreams, marshals the forces, and tends the fires until vision becomes reality.

Values

Let's play the word association game: you say a word and then I say the first word that comes into my mind. You say "leader" and I quickly say "values." The association of leader and values conjures a mental image of Gandhi dying in India with violence rising in the streets all around. He hasn't had anything to eat or drink for many days, and his life systems are slowly shutting down. He refuses to eat or drink until all the people in his country demonstrate that they are committed to the value of nonviolence.

Gandhi's fast is an expression of his personal commitment to nonviolence. His "way of being" teaches a poignant lesson: leaders, by their words and actions, are the keepers of values. Such words and actions emanate from deep within the heart of the leader. From this base of "knowing thyself," the leader is able to begin the work of calling forth the values and beliefs of the members of the organization. For example, the principal helps the members of the school community unveil their common values and define what they stand for and value as a collective. Articulating these values provides a beginning point for bonding among members of the school community. The values become the moral and ethical foundation for the work of the leader and the organization and guide them in decision making.

The next challenge of leadership is making visible these mutually held values and beliefs. Harvey and Lucia, in *144 Ways to Walk the Talk*, advise that "the true purpose of our values

statements is to guide both our behaviors and our decisions" (p. 7). To ensure that values are transformed into action, the leader serves as the guardian of the fidelity between values and actions.

Many school communities have labored to develop a school mission statement and articulate their values and beliefs about teaching and learning. Yet staff often do not reference these statements when they design their instructional programs. Nair, in *Lessons Learned From Gandhi*, says, "If we don't operationalize our ideals, they are often nothing more than slogans" (p. 26). The leader asks community members to commit to their ideals and then strive to align their actions with these ideals. Mistakes will be made, goals will be missed, but "knowing we will not be able to attain perfection is no excuse for not making a commitment" (Nair, p. 26). A quality leader offers the community the courage to speak its convictions, the strength to live by them, and the opportunities to operationalize them.

Case Study on Values: Sanford Elementary School

Because his previous experiences in the school system demonstrate a strong belief system and well-articulated commitment to inclusion, Dr. Beamer was chosen for the principalship of Sanford Elementary School.

At the beginning of his career as a classroom teacher 20 years ago, Dr. Beamer initiated a relationship with both the special education and LEP teachers serving his students; he invited them to co-teach with him and regularly used his lunch break to plan with them. He encouraged his students to identify and speak openly about their uniqueness. Dr. Beamer modeled for his students an appreciation of each of their differences. In a staff development position, Dr. Beamer facilitated teacher research projects on the teacher's role in developing an inclusive classroom community. These projects provided teachers with an opportunity to reflect on their own biases, prejudices, and present practices, and then create new or different practices to further inclusive classroom communities. Before Sanford Elementary School opened its doors, Dr. Beamer was able to select and then meet with its future faculty. Together they explored such questions as, How will we welcome and honor all members of our school community? and How will we work together to ensure that all share in the responsibility of educating our children?

■ **This case study demonstrates that Dr. Beamer is an educator who consistently "leads from the heart" and from a set of values about respecting and including everyone. His actions throughout his career in education speak to a passion about his belief system. In his positions of leadership, he has created opportunities for discussion, has shared decision making, and has honored each person's contribution to the community.**

Service

Just as "ethical" and "moral" are words associated with values-based leadership, "steward" and "servant" are associated with service-based leadership. A service leader acts as a steward to the purpose, vision, and values of the organization and to its individual members. According to Peter Block (1993), stewardship is the willingness to be accountable for the well-being of the larger organization by operating in service, rather than in control, of those around us. Stewardship is different from charismatic leadership in that the light does not shine solely on the power of the leader but rather on the community members and their contributions. In *The Tao of Leadership,* Heider, (1985) offers a simple image to illustrate service-based leadership:

> *Imagine you are a midwife, you are assisting someone else's birth. Do good without showing fuss. Facilitate what is happening rather than what you think ought to be happening. If you must take the lead, lead so that the mother is helped, yet still free and in charge. When the baby is born, the mother will rightly say, "We did it ourselves!"* (p. 33)

A service leader enables all members of the community to fully experience their contribution to the well-being of the organization by creating systems that allow them to study and learn from each other.

Service leadership in schools has been described as "a commitment to administer to the needs of the school as an institution by serving its purposes, by serving those who struggle to embody these purposes, and by acting as a guardian to protect the institutional integrity of the school" (Sergiovanni, 1996, p. 88). In schools, principals operationalize this idea by establishing infrastructures that "clear the way" for staff to realize their full potential and forward the vision of the school. The school principal clears the way by providing needed resources, planning for ongoing collaboration, eliminating impeding practices, enrolling the public in the work of the school, and protecting the integrity of the school. For example, if the school is not producing the desired results, the principal challenges the staff to revisit what they are doing; and when difficult issues arise, they are confronted and negotiated, not ignored. In *Total Leaders* (1998), Charles Schwahn and William Spady elaborate on the challenge and responsibility of service leadership: "While the term service sounds soft, the duty is hard. When obstacles are impeding success,...[the leaders] insist changes be made. When the integrity of the organization's purpose and success are at stake, they are the first to step up" (p. 104).

Service-based leadership is especially applicable to a school where a culture of collaborating, learning, and innovating predominates among the staff. The staff and principal share ownership for maintaining a cycle of focusing on what is good for the school as a whole. In this environment, the school leader serves the community as a guide, not as a controlling force. The leader who is in service holds the vision and the expectations of the community high enough for all to see and then supports and empowers the school's staff to continuously develop the knowledge, skills, and strategies necessary to realize the school's vision.

Case Study on Service: Lakeside Elementary School

Lakeside Elementary School has five pods, each with six classrooms that share a common area. The school staff have self-organized themselves into in family groupings—that is, groupings that include multiple grade levels. Such groupings ensure continuity of instruction across grade levels and increased opportunities for multiage groupings, integration, and relationships between students and teachers.

Each "family-cluster" teaching team meets bimonthly. Either the principal, Ms. Roley, or assistant principal, Mr. DelRosa, attends one monthly meeting per team and addresses questions, concerns, and/or challenges about instruction and collaboration. Family meetings are primarily focused on team planning and instructional issues. Most administrative matters are handled by memo or at the quarterly faculty meetings.

Feedback from these self-organized teams has led the staff and administration to agree on several significant schoolwide changes including the following: (1) parent meetings are now conducted according to family group instead of grade level; (2) monthly parent meetings are scheduled alternately during the evening and daytime hours; (3) a position for a "multiple intelligences" resource teacher has been created; and (4) all teachers have the option of making two home visits per year.

Lakeside Elementary is an example of a school whose infrastructure is consistent with the vision, values, and purpose of the school community: The family groupings and staff cluster meetings promote a continuity of instruction and relationships among staff, students, and families. A master schedule permits joint planning time that facilitates ongoing collaboration, learning, and capacity building.

■ **This case study demonstrates that the decisions of the leadership of Lakeside Elementary are driven by the vision of the school and by a high regard for serving the faculty. The leader is attentive to the recommendations of the learning teams and family clusters; teachers are empowered to create a school that is constantly moving in the direction of fulfilling their vision.**

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A leader who serves also allows the staff to make key decisions about their work with children. When initiatives come along, staff are allotted time to study them, talk about them, experiment with them in the classroom, and reflect on their efficacy. Staff are expected to evaluate new as well as old practices in relationship to the school's values and purpose and their desired outcomes for students.

In schools with vital professional learning communities, shared leadership blossoms from within the ranks of the school staff. When staff have the freedom to explore, experiment, find new resources, and try new practices, they begin organizing themselves into groups for support and reflection. Within these groups, members assume leadership roles. Before long, multiple leaders emerge and a synergistic energy arises from many people working toward a common goal.

Capacity Building

> *Vital organizations have adopted an attitude of lifetime learning, and they help their members make everyday learning a reality in their lives. The nourishment of individuals lies at the heart of vital organizations, and the nourishment of individuals begins with the opportunity to learn.* (DePree 1997, p. 105)

A school cannot realize its vision without expanding the skill and knowledge base of its staff. Through capacity-building activities, a school begins to close the gap between its current abilities and needed capabilities. This closing is accomplished by focusing on both individual and organizational capacity building.

At the individual level, a quality leader ignites and nurtures each person's capacity to learn, grow, and change. A climate that encourages risk taking is fundamental when staff members need to stretch beyond what they know and explore frontiers. DePree (1997) feels risk taking offers "opportunities to move closer to our potential. Risks result in a kind of learning available in no other way" (pp. 144-45). In an organization that prizes learning, risks cease to be threatening, and powerful lessons can be learned from success and failure. Sometimes our most poignant learning comes from failed attempts.

In this risk-taking environment, the leader often acts as a coach, who helps clarify goals and encourages action. For some, encouragement means stimulating new ways of thinking; for others, it means shoring up self-confidence. Regardless of the approach, the coach ultimately retreats, letting the learners spread their wings and take their bows.

The effect of individual capacity building within a school is exponential because it enables an entire school community to become more competent as it journeys toward its vision. But developing the "collective mind" cannot be left to chance. Faculty members require time and opportunities to learn and reflect on quality practices together. Leaders must consider ways to facilitate the ongoing questions of (1) how to encourage school-based study groups and (2) how to align emerging practices with the school vision. Leaders create expectations for high levels of individual and organizational competence when they incorporate physical and temporal infrastructures within a school that promotes ongoing collaboration among professionals for sharing information, knowledge, and skills.

Case Study on Capacity Building: Oakwood Elementary School

The faculty, parents, and administration of Oakwood Elementary School have developed a vision for their school: all students receive an individualized, quality education program that recognizes their unique characteristics and maximizes their potential in both the academic and personal-social domains. Parents and faculty have agreed to institute two multiage classes at every grade level in two years.

To develop a plan to build the staff's capacity to realize this vision, the principal has both surveyed and interviewed staff members about their needs and interests. After reviewing staff surveys and current research about professional development and school change, the principal has reallocated funds to support three major thrusts for staff development during the school year: (1) on- and off-site observations and debriefings, (2) teacher research groups on topics identified by staff, and (3) acquisition of resources on multiage and related topics for the school's professional library.

■ **The principal recognizes that for change and improvement to occur, the knowledge, skills, and strategies of the staff need to be developed and enriched. The principal also respects the ability of the faculty members to identify their needs to improve both their individual and the school's capacity to create a different future.**

Relationship Building

Recently, while discussing teaming and collaborating, the staff of an elementary school generated a list of successful teams: the Chicago Bulls, Seinfeld Company, and Roy Rogers and Dale Evans. Several staffers quickly decided that a supertalented leader, such as Jerry Seinfeld or Michael Jordan, was the cause of the team's success. This is the image of the

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leader as the hero whose charisma motivates all. An alternative image of leadership is emerging: the leader as an architect of relationships. In this capacity, the leader designs a workplace where relationships are primary, where connections are open and active, where diversity is valued, and where a sense of belonging and trust are pervasive.

Leaders in vital organizations seek new ways to connect people to each other. Margaret Wheatley and Myron Kellner-Rogers (1996) advise that (1) the more access people have to one another, the more possibilities there are and (2) when structured organizational charts thwart access to people and information, individual and organizational potential is diminished. People need to be free to reach anywhere to accomplish their work. Leaders are responsible for creating the structures, both human and technological, that give an organization access to itself and the larger world.

The architect of relationships values diversity. Leaders who truly value diversity are challenged by different thinking and work styles and capitalize on the potential of congregating groups with diverse perspectives. Leaders intentionally move in different circles and seek ideas at the periphery. In building professional learning communities in schools, the principal who values diversity promotes multidisciplinary representation on collaborative learning teams and provides opportunities for learning teams to seek new or different perspectives.

Relationships are based on belonging. People become related as a result of deciding that they belong together because they share in a common purpose. Abraham Maslow suggests in his hierarchy of needs that a sense of belonging and acceptance precedes our ability to perform to our potential. When we are in relationships with others, we learn more about ourselves and our individual and collective potential. Belonging creates a climate of safety where risk taking for the purpose of capacity building can thrive. The leader sets the tone for belonging.

Relationships are also based on trust. Stephen Covey, in *Principle-Centered Leadership* (1990), offers some insights into the leader's role in developing a trusting organization. Covey believes that trust between people emerges from a core of trustworthiness. Trustworthiness is a personal phenomenon that combines character and competence. Leaders demonstrate trustworthiness through their personal integrity and professional competence while they simultaneously create opportunities for staff to demonstrate their trustworthiness. The combination of these actions supports the development of group trust. Relationships are central to developing professional learning communities. Leaders who weave strong, dynamic webs of relationships in their schools help build the trust and the stimulation necessary to step into the world of innovation.

Case Study on Relationship Building: Crossroads Elementary School

Ms. Stevens is in her second year of leadership at Crossroads Elementary, a school with 785 students in preschool through fifth grade and 42 teachers. Ms. Stevens decided that this year she would abandon her monthly full faculty meetings in order to meet with the staff in small groups. Ms. Stevens' goals are to establish a better understanding of the needs of her staff, appreciate their gifts, and develop a plan to share the expertise of each with the others. Ms. Stevens now meets once a month with each team—early childhood and elementary. She has also worked out a rotation so that once every three weeks she meets individually with each member of the staff for 20 minutes. An end-of-the-year survey of the teaching staff indicates that as a team the members feel more closely connected, they resource each other's expertise more frequently than in the past, and they feel empowered by the support and understanding between themselves and their principal.

■ **As a result of Ms. Stevens' commitment to creating networks of relationships, the staff has become more knowledgeable. Establishing infrastructures that facilitate relationships has resulted in the staff's sense of empowerment.**

Final Thoughts

This chapter has isolated five qualities of leadership that are central to building professional learning communities in our schools. Yet in reality, the school leader does not wear one hat at a time but rather juggles multiple roles. In *A New Vision for Staff Development*, Rosie O'Brian Votjek, an elementary school principal, describes her experience as a leader of a future-focused school:

> *I served as a facilitator, consultant, instructor, and colleague who assisted teachers in integrating curriculum, using new instructional practices…I promoted different kinds of staff development, but the most important thing I did was "walk the talk." I facilitated learning…[by] asking tough questions; managing the change process; serving as a cheerleader, supporter, and advocate for teachers; keeping the vision out front; helping to connect people. To do this, it is critical to get to know the teachers on an individual basis, to know their needs, and to celebrate their successes.* (Hirsh and Sparks, 1997, p. 100)

Leadership is best described as amorphous, complex, and ever changing. Leading the development of learning communities adds another level of ambiguity. Rebecca van der Bogert, in *Making Learning Communities Work* (1998), points out that "the term community of learners is currently about as common and revered as motherhood and apple pie. Bringing

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the concept to reality is far more difficult than baking an apple pie, [although] the need for ongoing nurturance and the degree of challenge are perhaps comparable to motherhood."

Transforming our schools into professional learning communities demands quality leadership—leadership that is a commitment of the heart, mind, and spirit; leadership that is about the future; and leadership where intention becomes reality.

Holly Blum, an early childhood curriculum and integration specialist in Fairfax County, Virginia, Public Schools, conceptualized this chapter. Penelope Wald, Project Director for Project REALIGN, The George Washington University, helped to further refine the concepts.

Part II

Building Professional Learning Communities: The Process

IV: Identity of the Learning Community

This chapter presents a framework that supports a school community in discovering its identity. Dimensions that contribute to a school community knowing itself include its history, values, purpose, current reality, and vision. Multiple approaches can be used to explore a school's identity. Activities that help a community identify where it has been, where it is, and where it wants to go are suggested throughout this chapter.

Teachers have long functioned in isolated classrooms, void of meaningful connections with colleagues. For those who seek to make connections and nurture others in this profession, this is both an unwanted and an unnatural state. A new metaphor for schools is emerging—schools as communities. The idea of schools as communities sits in juxtaposition to the isolated, compartmentalized approach to education. At the heart of the concept of community is wholeness and connectedness. Community is grounded in networks of relationships and a sense of identity.

If schools are to function as communities, many changes must occur. First, individuals in a community need a clear sense of personal identity. Thoughtful reflection about self-identity prepares individuals to work in changing environments by helping them recognize and "own" their thoughts, emotions, hopes, and dreams. Second, members of the school community must actively engage in discovering who they are as a community and what they want to create. Community members might include teaching staff, parents, administrators, children, support staff, and other community representatives. As this group engages in ongoing dialogue about its history, values, current situation, and dreams, a shared identity emerges. A good way to begin creating a shared identity is by becoming better acquainted.

Getting Acquainted

In every culture, social rules govern behavior when individuals meet strangers. There are greetings and polite ways to learn more about another person. In the United States, people often shake hands and say "hello" as a simple formality to start a conversation. When individuals form a group for learning together, they must first become acquainted. This process of getting acquainted sets the tone for future interactions. Within groups, people are often asked to introduce themselves. Beyond being asked to state one's name, individuals may also be asked to reveal other information. The following three activities offer individuals an opportunity to get acquainted.

- WHAT'S IN IT FOR ME?: Participants walk around the room, introduce themselves, and share what they hope to learn from the meeting. This activity both warms up the room and focuses participants on their expectations for the event.
- DESIGNER NAME TAGS: Participants decorate their name tags with pictures, words, or phrases that reveal something about themselves. They form groups of three and introduce themselves. Groups change every few minutes.
- POLAROID PICTURES: As participants enter the event, their picture is taken, and they are asked to write their name and three things about themselves on a label. The picture and personal information are affixed to a poster board, creating a permanent display of the community. This activity requires a Polaroid camera, film, adhesive labels, marking pens, and a large poster board.

Learning together is an interactive process that requires not only getting acquainted, but also continually learning about each other's perspectives. Introductions mark the beginning. Additional "getting acquainted' activities continue to uncover the diversity of values, beliefs, and experiences within a group. The following activities offer participants opportunities to share their unique perspectives and learn about their colleagues.

- TRUE CONFESSIONS IN FOUR CORNERS (Carter and Curtis 1994): The room is prepared with the paraphenalia for different roles (such as ship's captain, medic, guardian angel, and tour guide) displayed in each corner. Participants are asked to move to the corner that best describes them as a teacher. Once participants gather in the corner with other colleagues, they discuss the reasons for their choice among themselves. They then share this information with participants in the other corners. The leader of the large group may ask questions such as, Did members in your group have different reasons for choosing the same corner? or What surprised you about the explanations given by the

groups in the other corners? Such an activity reveals a teacher's beliefs about his or her role and demonstrates that each role can be interpreted differently by different people. For example, to some people a tour guide plans wonderful trips in coordination with the wishes of the client. To others, a tour guide dictates the itinerary without considering the client.

- THE JOB GAME (Carter and Curtis 1994): Index cards with roles on them such as gardener, artist, lawyer, plumber, and banker are created. The cards are put on tables and people circulate and collect cards until they have several cards they want to keep. In small groups, participants share their reasons for their card selections. The following questions can be explored: (1) What appeals to you about the jobs/roles you kept? (2) Does this role capitalize on something you are good at? (3) Is this role completely different from your current job, or is it related? An alternative way to play this game is to give each person two to three cards and have them trade cards until they get the ones they like. The conversation is lively during the trading process as participants try to collect the roles they value.
- YOUR CALLING: Participants are asked to draw a picture, make a collage, or create a graphic that captures their memory of what "called' them to the teaching profession. They are asked to think about what they were hoping and dreaming when they decided to become teachers. Using paper, markers, and crayons, everyone takes approximately 15 minutes to represent their thoughts. Participants share pictures and stories in small groups. Each person gets 5 minutes of uninterrupted time to talk about his or her calling. This sharing is followed by group discussion during which participants are encouraged to ask each other questions. This activity offers participants an opportunity to recall memorable points in time, special people, and significant events that impacted their career choice.
- MOMENTS OF MAGIC: This activity provides a method for sharing personal/professional histories with colleagues. A Moments of Magic chart is hung in a school hallway or teacher's lunchroom. Marking pens are attached to the chart. Staff members are asked to fill in their squares by a certain date. Staff then use the Moments of Magic chart to learn more about each other and to "tease out" magical things about their team.

Figure 3: **Moments of Magic Chart**

Community Member	Sue	Mark	Brenda	Natalie	Lisa
Magical Motivator: belief or issue about which you are passionate					
Magical People: person/s who have strongly influenced you professionally					
Magical Events: experiences that have shaped you professionally					

Exploring Our History

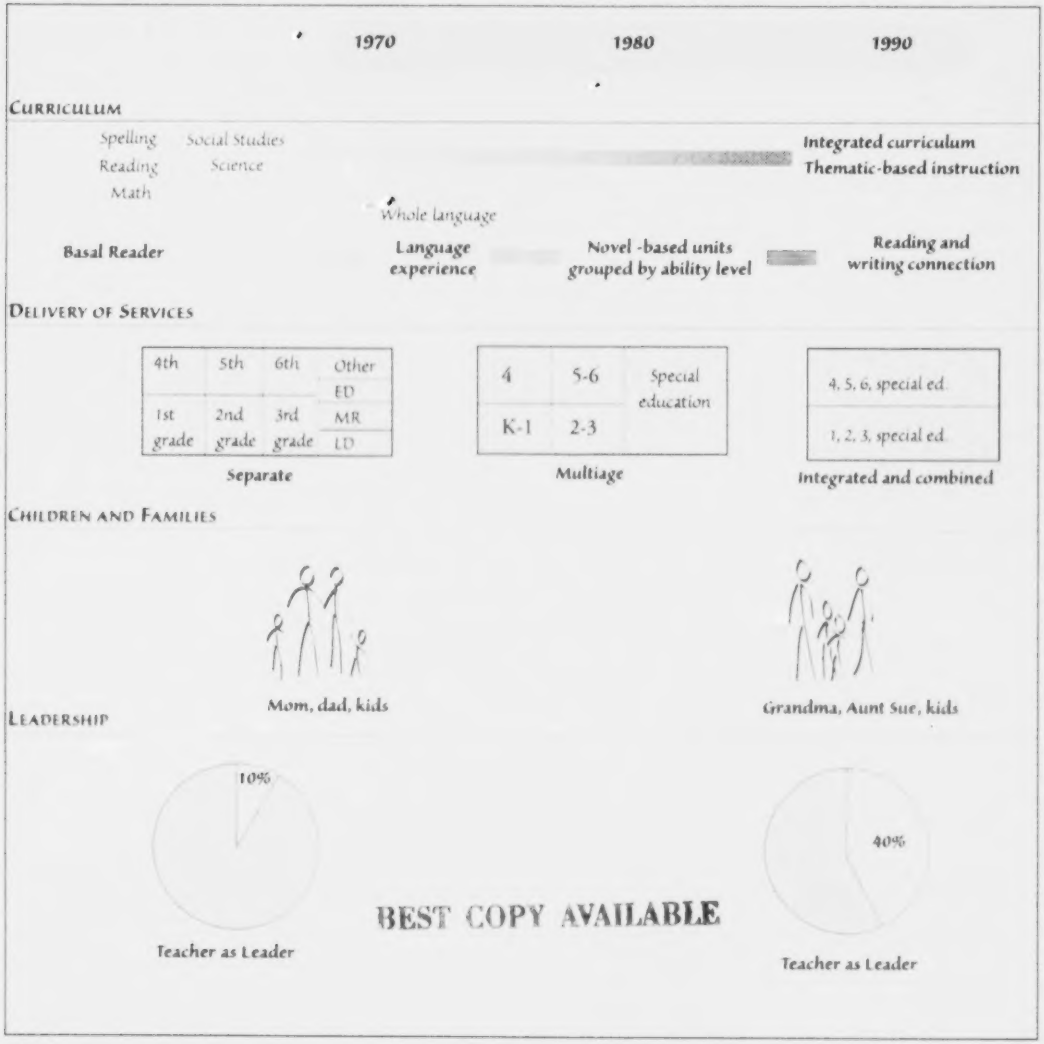
Exploring the history of a school community answers the question, Where have we been? We study and reflect upon past events both to learn from the past and to develop a better understanding of our current situation. Often sources of inspiration, the school's stories tell the tales of achievement and disappointment, of pride and sorrow.

A variety of methods provide glimpses of the history of a school community: a scrapbook, a slide show, a "memorable moments" collage, or retrospective talks from veteran staff and community members. "Histomapping" (Bailey 1996) is a whole group method for exploring the history of an organization and allows groups of people to visually represent important events in the life of their community on a time line. As each member of the group adds pictures or symbols to a Histomap, a common base of information about the past is generated. The experiences and wisdom of veteran members are honored, while novice members have an opportunity to more fully understand the historical forces that had an impact on the school. By honoring the past and reaping its wisdom, the group as a whole is better positioned to explore the future.

A variety of historical themes or categories can be explored using the Histomap. The categories vary depending on the purpose of the activity. In the example below, a group of principals in a school district identified significant events in 10-year increments in (1) curriculum, (2) delivery of services, (3) children and families, and (4) leadership. The Histomap identified trends that had occurred in the district. Categories on the Histomap vary with the group. Other categories a group might explore include policies, facilities, communities,

and key people. The time span explored also varies with the group. Suzanne Bailey (1996) suggests that when creating a Histomap a school should look as far into the past as it wants to look into the future. For example, if a school wants to plan 10 years into its future, staff need to examine at least the past 10 years of events in the school.

Figure 4: ***Histomap***



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Once all the pictures or symbols have been attached to the Histomap and the stories behind the pictures have been shared, the group examines the entire spectrum of significant events. Questions the group might explore include the following:

- *What lessons can we learn from the past?*
- *Do we have different interpretations of the same event?*
- *Are there reccurring patterns or emerging trends?*
- *What are the specific strengths and weaknesses of our community?*

A discussion around any of these questions will help the group establish shared meaning and a common background of knowledge. Having the whole group construct and interpret the history of it's community is a significant step in establishing a group identity.

Articulating Our Core Ideology

"Core ideology defines the enduring character of an organization [and]. . . provides the glue that holds an organization together" in times of change (Collins and Porras 1996, p. 66). The core ideology of a school community is its core purpose and core values. Successful schools incorporate their core ideology into their daily workings. In these schools, the core ideology is more than a mission statement that hangs on the wall—it is a force that permeates the building and is perpetuated by those within the school community.

The diversity of the individuals within a school gives rise to different perspectives about the core ideology. Individuals bring a set of personal beliefs and values that have been shaped over the years. Articulating a core ideology, therefore, necessitates finding the common ground among diverse views. Common ground is different from consensus in that it involves forming alignment rather than agreement. Finding common ground both acknowledges the value in different perspectives and looks for commonalties among such perspectives. During this process of finding common ground, we need to hear and appreciate differences, rather than attempt to reconcile them. We are not being asked to surrender our perspectives. Rather, we are asked to listen for our perspectives in the voices of others. By making concerted efforts to unearth the common ground existing within our school community, we strengthen the bonds of established relationships while we create new relationships.

Core Purpose

The core purpose of a school community is the component of core ideology that answers the question, Why do we exist? The core purpose is different from a school's goals in that

the core purpose cannot be fulfilled. "It is like a guiding star on the horizon—forever pursued but never reached" (Collins and Porras 1996, p. 69). The core purpose captures the idealism of the organization. It is the work of every school community to discover its unique purpose—a purpose that reflects its ideals, its soul, its essence.

Two examples of a school's core purpose are the following:

- At Middletown Elementary School we will create and nurture a community of lifelong learners.
- At Essex Elementary School we will work together to effectively meet the needs of all our students and families.

Collins and Porras (1996) have suggested the following methods to help a group articulate its core purpose.

METHOD 1: Begin at the individual level by asking each group member to reflect on the following two questions: (1) Why did you choose to belong to this community or this profession? (2) What deeper sense of purpose motivates you to dedicate your time and energy each day to this work? Individuals then share their thoughts with the group and look for a common bond.

METHOD 2: In this activity the group asks *why* five times. The group begins with a descriptive statement of what they do.

"We do X." Then they proceed to ask, Why is that important? for five times.

"We educate children." *Why is that important?*

"So they can be productive citizens." *Why is that important?*

By the fifth "why is that important," the essence of why we are together begins to be voiced.

METHOD 3: In this activity the group discusses the question, What would happen if our program, our school, or our service ceased to exist? This question helps a group get in touch with why it exists.

When first articulating the core purpose, the group should not get stuck in finding the perfect phrases. Discovering the heart and soul of the organization, its "reason for being," takes time. The initial document is a working document that will be revisited and revised many times throughout the process of creating a school's identity.

Core Values

> *A core value is a central belief deeply understood and shared by every member of an organization. Core values guide the actions of everyone in the organization; they focus its energy and are the anchor points for all its plans.* (Saphier and D'Auria, 1993, p. 3)

The core values of a school community form its belief system. A powerful message is available to the students and families in the school when an entire staff is operating from the same set of values. For example, a school that believes that "all children learn and all children belong" has strong pillars to guide its actions. With a core of shared values, the staff can act autonomously, yet harmony is in the message that permeates the school.

Communities typically have only a few core values that are meaningful to everyone. In identifying core values, seeking common ground rather than consensus is important. To force consensus about deeply felt beliefs would be incompatible with the concept of core values. The following are examples of a school's core values:

- We believe learning is an ongoing, individualized process.
- We believe all people learn.
- We respect and value individual differences.

Core values depict a way of being. They describe the essential nature of an organization. Two questions help to distinguish values that have enduring qualities from values that are based on current trends:

- Which values do we envision being valid for our community in 100 years?
- Would we lose a significant piece of our identity as a school if this value was absent?

Because values are the underlying constant force that guides practice, they must be distinguished from practice. Values are not subject to change, whereas practice may change over time. A core value mentioned above is that we believe learning is an ongoing, individualized process. In the 1970s, the practice most commonly associated with that value was the pull-out model of service delivery. If children needed gifted or special education, they most often received specialized instruction in a separate room with a specialist. Today, a more common practice is an integrated model of service delivery in which the specialized instruction is provided in the general education classroom. The core value that learning is an ongoing, individualized process is the same in both situations. The best practice has changed.

Discrepancies can often be found in what we say we believe and what we practice on a daily basis. For example, if a school community holds a belief that children are first, does this belief permeate the school environment? Are teachers willing to do whatever it takes to put children first? Do children's needs and interests drive school decisions? Do parents feel that their children are the top priority of the school? Articulating values is often easier than incorporating them into daily practice. A school community must have tools to examine both discrepancies and alignment between values and actions.

Schools have many arenas, such as the daily classroom routine, the instructional materials, the evaluation system, the discipline procedures, the lunchroom, or the teachers' workroom, where core values are evident (Saphier and D'Auria 1993). In a school where practice is congruent with core values, the values would be evident in every arena. The daily routine, the discipline procedure, and the organization of the teachers' workroom would support learning as an ongoing, individualized process. Examining current practice in light of the school's core values, one arena at a time, provides a conduit for aligning a school community with its belief system.

Assessing Current Reality

Current reality describes the present situation of a school community. A number of forces impact a school's current reality. These forces, emerging both from inside and outside of the school building, include students and their families, staff expertise and diversity, organizational structure, human and fiscal resources, school initiatives, and school climate, to mention a few.

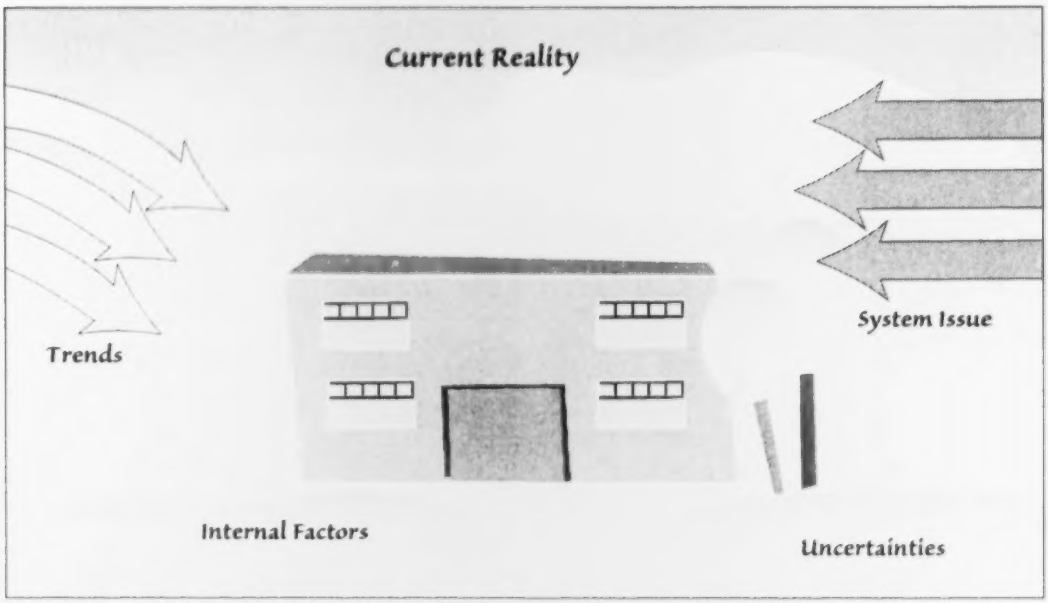
Each individual in a school community perceives the impact of these forces in a unique manner. This perception might result in both positive and negative interpretations of the same force. One example is the impact of an increasingly diverse population within the school community. Some staff may find additional languages and cultures to be an overwhelming burden, whereas others may view this addition as an opportunity to create a culturally rich learning environment.

Understanding the forces impacting a community is an important part of looking toward the future. Often, dreams appear unattainable because of present forces or obligations. Assessing current reality provides a forum for viewing how things actually are in relation to how we would like them to be. Questions guiding this process might be, What we are doing? Are our practices getting us what we want?

Several other tools might be used to examine current reality.

- CONTEXT MAPPING (The Grove Consultants International 1997): This tool offers participants a visual representation of the significant internal and external forces impacting a school's current situation. To begin this activity, hang a 4' x 6' piece of chart paper on a wall. Draw a big picture of the school in the middle. Participants write elements, either internal or external, that impact the school on Post-its, one element per Post-it. Each participant picks two to three elements they feel are most important and shares them with the group. The ideas are clustered together and labeled as categories. The categories are then arranged on the chart in a way that best depicts the current situation in the school.

Figure 5: **Context Mapping**

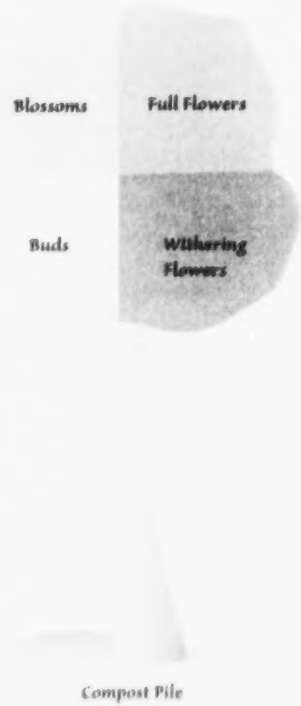


- CURRENT SNAPSHOT (Bailey 1996): This activity identifies the current initiatives in a school and the degree to which they have been implemented. Current Snapshot begins with participants listing all the initiatives, projects, and programs with which their school is currently involved. Then participants examine each program and place

the program's name on the appropriate sector of the tree. The key assists the group in making placement decisions.

The force field analysis, described in chapter VII, "Tools for Learning," is another tool for assessing a school's current reality. Each of these tools provides useful visual diagrams that help a school community develop a common understanding of the forces currently impacting it.

Figure 6: **Current Snapshot**



Key for Current Snapshot

Seeds: initiatives that are being planted
Buds: initiatives that are in the early stages of development
Full Flowers: initiatives that are in full implementation
Withering Flowers: initiatives that are dying
Compost Pile: initiatives that are no longer needed

Creating a Shared Vision

A shared vision is a clear, compelling image of the community's future. It answers the question, What do we want to create? A shared vision is aligned with the core purpose of the community, but it is more specific. The core purpose states a general direction for the community, such as "go west," while the shared vision describes the specific destination—"to the top of that mountain." A shared vision inspires members of the community because it enfolds the dreams of each individual into a community dream. This dream is formulated into a statement that clearly articulates the school's commitment to the education of its children.

An example of a shared vision statement is, "Our school is a playground for learning." From this big-picture statement, it is helpful to create "minipictures" or statements of specific measurable results. Minipictures are formed by considering questions such

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as, How do we know when we have reached our vision? What will our children be doing? What will our teachers be doing? Our administrators? Our parents? The answers to these questions "ground" the vision in reality and provide benchmarks for tracking progress.

Creating a shared vision begins with the voicing of personal visions—what is it that we, as individuals, want to accomplish in our life and in our work? The following activities help educators begin to identify their personal/professional visions.

- AWARDS BANQUET: Participants are asked to imagine an awards banquet being held 10 years in the future where they are being honored for their outstanding service in the field of education. A colleague is speaking to the group about the accomplishments of the award winner. What would their colleague say about them? Each participant is asked to write a two-minute speech that expresses what they hope will be said about their accomplishments. This exercise helps clarify and make public the dream inside of each person. For example, Ms. Smith always knew her purpose as a teacher was to prepare her students for future academic success. Through the Awards Banquet exercise, Ms. Smith discovered that she was passionate about instilling a love of learning in each of her students. She will know she has accomplished this when her students are consistently inquisitive, motivated, and excited about their work.
- MAKING A DIFFERENCE (Saphier and D'Auria 1993): Another question that helps clarify the vision of teaching staff is, In what ways do you want your students to be different as a result of having spent this year with you? After reflecting on this question, staff share answers and document their hopes and dreams on a large chart. The public expression of each community member's personal aspirations provides the school community with an authentic base upon which to create a shared vision.

After talking about personal visions and desires, a community is ready to begin formulating its shared vision of the community's future. Three activities can be found in Chapter VII, "Tools for Learning," to help a community develop their shared vision. *Affinity* and *Open Space* facilitate the merging of personal visions into a shared vision. *Probable and Preferred Future* helps a community look at trends associated with current reality and a preferred direction for change.

Often a community is too large to work as a unit and needs to break into smaller groups to begin the shared visioning process. Skits, songs, poems, commercials, and magazine articles are all great mediums for small groups to voice their collective vision for the future. After the skits, commercials, or magazine articles are developed, the community reconvenes and

each small group shares its vision. When all the groups have shared, the community identifies the common themes and shapes a "rough" shared vision statement.

- VISION COMMERCIAL: Participants develop a commercial that markets the group's vision. The commercial is a 10-second spot that sells the vision. The following are tips to help create the commercial:
  - Think in terms of sounds and visual images that capture your future.
  - Think of three images that blend together in a 10-second spot.

    First Image→Second Image→Third Image→
  - Think of a caption or sound bite for each image.
  - Draw, describe, or act out your commercial.
- MAGAZINE COVER STORY (The Grove Consultants International 1997): Participants write a cover story about what their school has accomplished 10 years from now. The following suggested elements can be included in the cover story:
  - Bigger-than-life headline.
  - Bulleted list of outstanding accomplishments.
  - Pictures that support accomplishments.
  - Actions we took to get were we are.

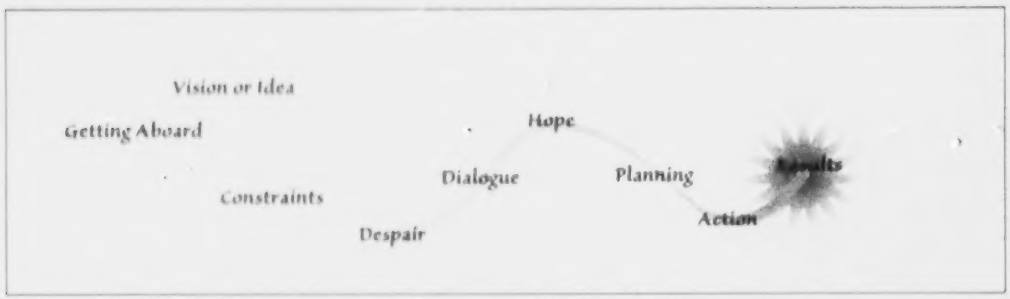
Creating a vital shared vision is a lengthy process that requires multiple opportunities for active conversation followed by reflection. The community continually revisits its shared vision statement to refine and ensure its meaningfulness. Collins and Porras (1996) offer advice on creating an inspirational shared vision: "There are no right answers. Did Beethoven create the right Ninth Symphony? Did Shakespeare create the right *Hamlet*? We can't answer these questions…The envisioned future involves essential questions. Does this vision get your juices flowing? Do we find it stimulating? Does it spur forward momentum?" (p. 75).

Final Thoughts

Discovering an identity as a school community is a multiphase, multilayer process that requires the community to delve deep into its heart and soul. The community may not be proud of its past or may be discouraged by its current reality. The process of discovering a shared identity involves owning up to and accepting feelings about both personal identity and the identity of the school. This process can create a very emotionally volatile atmos-

phere within the school. A roller-coaster ride is a metaphor commonly used to describe the feelings we may experience when digging through the past, examining the present realities, and creating a new future. On a roller coaster, we tend to rise up high on the tracks as we envision and articulate our ideal future and then rapidly drop into dismay as we examine our day-to-day constraints. As we begin to see new possibilities in our current reality, the mood lightens again. This up-and-down ride continues through the various stages of the change process as we seek to learn more about who we are as a school and what we want to become.

Figure 7: **Roller Coaster of Change**



In school communities, everyone has a voice in creating the future. Collective conversations about the school community's history, values, purpose, current reality, and vision support the creation of a shared identity and serve as a conduit for forming deep and meaningful relationships within the school. The search for identity—who we are and who we want to be—is a vehicle for us to collectively and continuously renew our school community and discover better ways to educate our children.

Amy King and Maret Wahab, preschool special education teachers in Fairfax County, Virginia, Public Schools, are primary contributors to this chapter. Andrea Sobel, Training Specialist, and Penelope Wald, Project Director for Project REALIGN, The George Washington University, also contributed.

V: Learning as a Community

As professionals in the field of education, many of us have mastered the skill of learning individually, but our capacity to learn collectively is underdeveloped. This chapter introduces a process that supports staff in learning together—a process that helps develop collaborative cultures — "where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, and where collective aspiration is set free" (Senge 1990, p.3). This process, called the collaborative learning process, begins as individuals discover and express their personal aspirations and needs. Collaborative learning teams then form around shared interests. The teams explore, talk about, and experiment with many ideas. Finally, new practices emerge. A scenario involving Hayward Elementary School is woven throughout the chapter to illustrate the application of the collaborative learning process.

Establishing a Staff Development Plan

> *We expect teachers to give their all to the growth and development of students. But a teacher cannot sustain such giving unless the conditions exist for the continued growth and development of the teacher.* (Sarason 1993, p. 62)

The previous chapter, "Identity of the Learning Community," presents ways that a school community can explore its identity and create its vision. When creating a vision, the staff decide what the school will look like at a future point in time and then develop specific measurable outcomes associated with that vision. This identity search and shared-visioning process leaves staff with a plan for action, sometimes called a strategic plan or a school improvement plan. For this plan to become a reality, staff members must often increase their own competencies in areas associated with the desired outcomes, such as their technology skills or knowledge of how to differentiate instruction. Because staff are working with a site-based school improvement plan, the plan for professional growth should also be site based. This approach allows staff to configure a professional development agenda that supports them in attaining their school outcomes and in addressing their individual needs. The first step in developing a site-based staff development plan is to identify the competencies and needs of individual staff members. Staff members examine their own strengths and

weaknesses and reflect on where they need to grow to help make the school vision a reality. By looking first at individual needs, each staff member is challenged to identify areas for growth that are both personally meaningful and beneficial to the students.

Questions to Identify Areas for Professional Growth
How do I need to grow to contribute to the realization of our school's vision?
What do I need to learn?

Next, staff members openly share their interests with their colleagues by searching for common interests. Processes that help staff discover shared professional interests vary from formal to informal activities. Collaborative learning teams might develop naturally out of lunchroom discussions, or they might emerge from a multistep process of identifying, reflecting, and group decision making. Any process used at this stage should encourage each staff member to voice his or her interests as well as promote active listening among staff members. *Affinity* and *Open Space,* tools included in Chapter VII, "Tools for Learning,"support the individual expression of interests as well as the listening for common themes. Once all interests are in the public arena, each staff member selects a specific topic of study that is personally meaningful and announces it to the group. As the process progresses, staff members who have similar professional development interests form clusters, which eventually become collaborative learning teams. When the topics for collaborative learning are funneled from individual interests to collective interests, the final decision represents the shared curiosity of all team members.

Self-organizing into collaborative learning teams can be a rather messy process. The following criteria offer some guidance for forming collaborative learning teams:

- Collaborative learning teams are self-organized around topics of study that are meaningful to the individual and the vision of the school.
- Membership is open to all members of the school community, including paraprofessionals, specialists, parents, and administrators.
- Membership is voluntary.
- Membership is flexible, allowing members to switch groups, leave groups, or join groups at any point in time.
- A final date for forming teams should be identified, at which time a list of topics and team members is posted.

Hayward Elementary School: A Case Study

Hayward Elementary School represents a fictitious school, yet it is based on the experiences of the authors as they worked with collaborative learning teams in elementary schools.

The tone of the conversations among the teaching staff at Hayward Elementary School has been the same for several months now: concerned, frustrated, and anxious. The student population of 385 at Hayward has been gradually changing over the past several years to include the following:

- More families whose home language is Spanish.
- An addition of a primary-age class for students with mild mental retardation (MR).
- Thirty-two students diagnosed as learning disabled in grades 1 through 5 (an increase of about 25 percent over the past two years).
- A significant increase in the number of students who have an attention deficit disorder (ADD) diagnosis in grades 2 through 5.

The school staff has also changed and grown to include personnel who have expertise in MR, limited English proficiency, and learning disabilities. Spurred on by the passing of the 1997 Reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, the state's Department of Education is emphasizing the integration of all students into general education programs, yet no statewide model for integrated schooling has been proposed. Each school can design its own model of service delivery based on the needs of its students.

A few months ago, Hayward staff, parents, and community members developed a shared vision. They decided that they wanted to be known as an inclusive school where (1) all children are special and (2) all children learn together to the maximum extent possible. The school is organized by grade levels, with separate classes or pullout programs for children with learning disabilities and other special needs. Moving from this segregated service delivery model to an inclusive school where students with special needs receive support and services in the general education classroom will require significant growth and change on the part of the staff. Establishing a staff development plan that addresses areas of need is one of the school's top priorities.

The principal used the *Affinity* tool to develop the school's professional development plan. First, each staff member reflected on the following question: If our school is to become a quality inclusive school, how do I need to grow and change? On Post-its, each staff member wrote several ideas for professional growth. Group members then presented their ideas in a round-robin fashion, sticking their Post-its on a big, empty wall and clustering the Post-it ideas that were similar. Through this personal and collective reflection process, five broad topics for professional study emerged: (1) transitions, (2) peer interactions, (3) parent partnerships, (4) teaching students with ADD, and (5) co-teaching. As a final step, each staff member selected one of the five topics that was personally meaningful. Staff members with shared interests formed collaborative learning teams that would spend the next nine months studying and experimenting together.

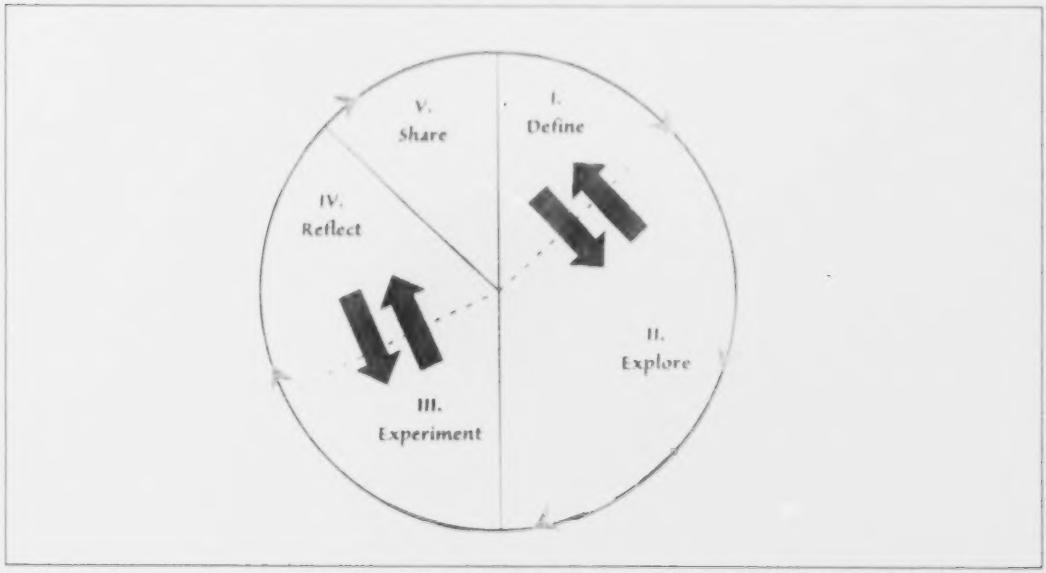
Introduction to the Collaborative Learning Process

> *Teachers learn just as their students do: by studying, doing, and reflecting; by collaborating with other teachers; by looking closely at students and their work; and by sharing what they see....Good settings for teacher learning provide lots of opportunities for research and inquiry, for trying and testing, for talking about and evaluating the results of learning and teaching.* (Darling-Hammond 1997, pp. 319-20)

The collaborative learning process is the means by which a group of people addresses the question, What are we going to learn together? Collaborative learning teams may answer that question in multiple ways. For example, they may expand their knowledge in a specific area, such as the impact of brain research on education; they may test new classroom strategies, such as reading theater; or they may design a new model for instructional delivery, such as a schoolwide transition plan. The topics of study are derived from the felt needs of the team members and relate to the vision of the school.

The collaborative learning process is cyclical and has five stages: (1) define, (2) explore, (3) experiment, (4) reflect, and (5) share.

Figure 8. **Collaborative Learning Process**



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Time spent at each stage of the cycle is proportional to its size in Figure 8. For example, the define stage takes about one-eighth of the total time whereas the explore stage is about three-eighths of the total.

A significant commitment of time is needed to complete one cycle of the collaborative learning process. Learning teams at Hayward Elementary School spent approximately 10 months completing the cycle. Team meetings varied from once a month to once a week, each lasting about two hours. Staff also spent time visiting exemplary programs, going to conferences, consulting with experts, and researching new practices. Figure 9 offers a sample time frame for a 9-month collaborative learning cycle. The more times the staff repeats this cyclical process, the more likely it is that "teachers as learners" will become a part of the school culture.

Having facilitators guide team members through the collaborative learning process and support them in their research and experimentation is advantageous. The role of facilitator can be assumed by someone outside the team, by a member of the team, or by team members

Figure 9: ***Timeline of the Collaborative Learning Process***

Stage of Collaborative Learning Process	Sample Timeline	Participating Group
Establish a Staff Development Plan	Month 1	Schoolwide
Form Collaborative Learning Teams	Month 2	Schoolwide
Define	Month 2	Collaborative Learning Team
Explore	Months 3-5	Collaborative Learning Team
Experiment	Months 6-9	Collaborative Learning Team
Reflect	Months 7-9	Collaborative Learning Team
Share	Month 10	Schoolwide

who rotate the position. Facilitators benefit from having support and guidance from the school leadership as well as from meeting regularly with other facilitators to reflect on their group's progress and review the next steps of the collaborative learning process.

Stages of the Collaborative Learning Process

Stage 1: Define

Create shared meaning about the topic and specific terms

At the onset of the collaborative learning process, each group member chooses to be a part of the group because of a personal interest in the topic of study. In the beginning, the topic probably has different meanings for different group members. For example, transitions, peer interaction, and teaching students with ADD are all common ideas in education, yet they probably mean significantly different things to different people. The following strategies may enhance developing a shared meaning among team members.

Strategies for Promoting Shared Meaning

- Slow down the conversation by asking a question before giving an opinion.
- Draw reasoning from a peer: "Can you help me understand your thinking?"
- Make sure you understand another's point of view: "Am I correct in saying you think...?"
- Encourage others to explore your idea: "What do you think about what I just said

Shared meaning can also be encouraged by having group members write the definitions of words that are confusing and then share their ideas. The understanding that emerges from discussing personal interpretations of words and topics helps create common ground for the group's collaborative work.

Further define topic of study

Once an acceptable level of shared meaning exists among team members, the topic of study can be more precisely worded. An interest in "transition" may be refined to reflect an interest in transitioning children with disabilities from grade to grade, or peer interaction may now mean peer interaction during free-choice time. This narrowing is a natural result of the group members sharing their understanding of their topic of study and sharing their personal preference for professional growth.

Formulate a question that addresses the topic of study

Having the topic of study formatted in a question rather than a statement is based on the teacher-research model (Calhoun 1993). The question is purposefully broad in scope so as to encourage a slowing down of solution-seeking behavior and a furthering of research and exploration behavior. This initial broad question can be easily configured by asking, What can we do differently to...[fill in topic of study]? Beginning with a more global question invites the multiple interests of all the team members to be expressed. At this point, the challenge is to keep all members of a learning team talking about what personally excites them. Teams must realize that their global question is only a starter question to help kick off the discussion-and-exploration process. Later, they will work together to mold a more precise question that continues to embrace multiple interests.

> **Questions to Help Formulate a Topic of Study**
> ***What can we do differently in the area we are studying?***
> ***How can we increase our capacity in this area?***

At Hayward Elementary School, one team of kindergarten, first, and second grade teachers wanted to learn more about teaching children with ADD. To create some shared understanding of their topic, team members discussed the meaning of ADD and the characteristics of children with ADD. Finally, they configured a broad question from which to launch their exploring phase: What can we do differently to accommodate the needs of students with ADD?

Also, a collaborative learning team made up of preschool regular and special education teachers and assistant teachers began their inquiry into the topic peer interaction by doing a

Figure 10: **Shared Meaning Chart**

Hayward Elementary School
Shared Meaning Chart

Write your thoughts and/or examples of what these words or ideas mean to you.

Peer Interaction	**Strategies**
▮ *children playing with one another*	▮ *activities*
▮ *children sharing a toy*	▮ *environmental arrangements*
▮ *children communicating, verbally and nonverbally*	▮ *teacher interventions*
	▮ *props or materials*

shared meaning chart. This chart helped them clarify terms such as "peer interaction" and "strategies." They then formulated their ideas into a question: "What can we do differently to encourage successful peer interactions?

Share topic of study and question with school community

To conclude this stage, each team drafts a statement of its topic of study, its question, and the relationship between the area of interest and the school vision. A *charter*, which is not a final plan but rather the first written rendering of the topic of study, helps the team translate its ideas into writing. Each team presents its charter to the entire school for feedback. Connecting the learning team's intentions with the thinking of the entire staff helps maintain an alignment of purpose and goals throughout the school community. Administrative approval is also sought at this time to ensure each topic of study has the support of the school leader.

Figure 11: **Charter**

CHARTER

Topic for Learning: Peer Interaction

Members: Ramona, Terry, Lyn, Maureen, Jill, Amy, and Vibha

1. What is our topic of study? *To increase the number of strategies for parents and teachers to promote peer interactions among children with and without special needs.*
2. How does this idea contribute to our school's vision? *Promotes social integration.*
3. What is our question? *What can we do differently to encourage successful peer interactions?*
4. What resources will we need to complete our project (time, materials, training, consultation, other)? *Articles and books, site visits, expert's visit to our school.*

Approval: *Marianne McDermott* **Date:** *9/10/95*

Principal

Stage 2: Explore

Develop a game plan

The explore stage accounts for a significant amount of time, approximately 40 percent, in the collaborative learning process. During this stage, team members engage in three major

Figure 12: **Game Plan**

Define	Explore	Experiment	Reflect	Share
▮ Peer interaction ▮ Indicator of success ▮ Areas of play to focus on	▮ Other programs ▮ Journals and books ▮ Local and state conferences ▮ Videos ▮ Internet	▮ Changing environment ▮ Teacher strategies ▮ Home strategies	▮ Use video to document and reflect ▮ Use a child study approach	▮ Share with parents and community preschools ▮ Keep informal ▮ Bring illustration to share
Current State: **Children without disabilities play together and ignore children with disabilities majority of time**				**Vision:** **Children with and without disabilities spontaneously play together during center time**
October	**Nov.-Jan.**	**Feb.-May**	**April-May**	**June**

tasks: (1) identify current practices, (2) explore new practices, and (3) refine the question. Teamwork is expedited when the team begins this phase by designing an overarching plan and timeline for exploring. An adaptation of the graphic game plan (The Grove Consultants International 1995) is a visual tool that can be used to assist the group by specifying methods and a sequence for exploring, as well as by visualizing how the plan relates to the schoolwide goal. The peer interaction team at Hayward Elementary began to explore by creating a game plan. It listed ways it wanted to explore its topic, including reading journal articles, reflecting on strategies currently being used, and visiting other classrooms. Individuals worked in pairs to look in different areas for information.

Identify current practices and underlying assumptions

In this phase, teams investigate what they are doing and why. "What" and "why" go hand in hand as team members identify current practice and then discuss the thinking behind the practice. At Hayward Elementary School, students with ADD spend 15 minutes every 2 hours in a pullout, small-group situation. As team members explored the question, Why do

we do this? they discovered their assumption was that regular changes in the setting enhance the ability of ADD students to learn. Through careful examination of current practices and underlying assumptions, the group had the baseline information necessary to move forward.

Questions About Current Practice
What am I or what are we doing?
What theories and assumptions drive my/our actions?

Explore new ideas and underlying assumptions

Much of the time and energy at the explore stage is spent searching for new information, sharing information, and reflecting on what the information means to the team. Teams often begin by identifying familiar resources to explore—familiar in that teams know about these resources but have not yet had time to investigate them.

Ways to look for new ideas

- Observe exemplary models
- Research and read
- Explore the Internet
- Interview experts
- Attend conferences
- Network with peers

Often, while teams are investigating, they discover new ideas and perspectives and share them. Members consider the new ideas and talk about the underlying assumptions. Over time, they realize that there are many different ways of thinking about problems. For example, the team investigating how to teach students with ADD realized that changing settings does not necessarily help students with ADD. For some students, it is more advantageous to consider frequent changes in activity within the same setting. This realization opens a different line of thinking and fuels the generative learning process among team members.

Questions for Exploring New Ideas
What new ideas have we heard about?
Where will we search for information about these new ideas?
What did we find in our searching?
What theories and assumptions are behind these ideas?

The Exploration Grid (see figure 13) and the KWL Chart (see figure 14) are useful tools to use during the explore stage. Both tools encourage the group to think about several aspects of study simultaneously and facilitate a shifting of focus among current practice, new ideas, and next steps for exploring.

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Figure 13: **Exploration Chart**

Hayward Elementary School
Exploration Grid

Team Question: *What can we do differently to accommodate the needs of children with ADD?*

What challenges are we currently experiencing and why?	**What is currently working for us and why?**	**What new ideas are we playing with and why?**	**What will we continue to investigate and why?**	**What is next?**
▮ For students with ADD the instruction becomes choppy because they frequently move in and out of the classroom. Questions exist about who is ultimately responsible for the progress of students with ADD.	▮ Team planning session with general and special educator helps get us on the same page.	▮ Having students with ADD switch activities within the room rather than move rooms might provide less fragmentation.	▮ Literature and consultants' opinions about best strategies for working with students with ADD offer new ideas.	▮ Visit schools where students with ADD are in the regular classroom. ▮ Do a literature search.

Refine question

Before a team moves into the experiment stage, the question is once again narrowed and fine-tuned. The refining process helps the team create a "doable"project that has a finite focus and definable parameters. The refining of the question requires a funneling of ideas to the core interest of the group.

Questions That Help Share Insights and Refine the Team's Question
What did we learn?
What are we interested in continuing to explore?
What question will best guide our work?

Figure 14: **KWL Chart**

Hayward Elementary School
KWL Chart

Team Question: *What can we do differently to encourage successful peer interactions?*

What We Know	What We Want To Know	What We Learned
▮ *Children without disabilities tend to play together more often during free-play time, leaving out the children with disabilities.*	▮ *Strategies to help the children with disabilities be more a part of the play situation, even though they may not have good communication skills.*	▮ *The digitized camera can help keep parents informed of interactions in the classroom. We can include pictures of the day's events in our report that we send home at the end of school.*
▮ *Most of our children with disabilities have a difficult time sharing their toys, entering a play situation, and carrying on an ongoing communication exchange.*	▮ *Ways to inform parents on a regular basis about the children that their child is playing with.*	▮ *Sensorimotor activities are prime for children of different ability and communication levels to play together.*
▮ *Parents of children with disabilities in our classes are very anxious about the behavior of their children and their acceptance by the other children.*	▮ *Ways to encourage parents to promote informal play situations between children in the class outside of school.*	▮ *Scripting is a good strategy to help children learn common play sequences in the housekeeping areas or at the sand and water table.*
	▮ *Environmental factors that would promote successful peer interactions, especially for those children who are withdrawn or aggressive.*	

In the case of the peer interaction group, the question changed from What can we do differently to encourage peer interactions during free-choice time? to How does the environment impact peer interaction during free-choice time? The teaching-children-with-ADD team changed its question from What can we do differently to accommodate the needs of students with ADD? to How can we adapt the classroom to keep the students with ADD continuously engaged in learning? In the next stage, experiment, one or more interventions that address the refined question are designed and tested.

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Stage 3: Experiment

Design action based on the question and a set of assumptions

The experiment stage is the time to try something new. During this stage teams need to remember that learning is an active process for adults as well as for children. The learner is continually constructing new ideas and theories. The construction of knowledge occurs through trial and error—through thinking and doing. Learning takes time, and accepting mistakes is part of the learning experience.

In the experiment stage, the team decides what actions to take based on their question and the assumptions from which they are operating. Articulating the underlying assumptions is challenging but contributes significantly to the learning because the team must explain the thinking behind its actions. For example, the peer interaction group modified its environment by integrating tables into the centers; this modification was based on the following assumptions: (1) young children interact more frequently when in smaller groups, and (2) tables tend to draw small groups of children together.

Questions for Designing an Experiment
What do we want to do?
Why do we think this is a good idea?
How are we going to accomplish this?

The team may design a singular experiment, or it can take a variety of actions. For example, actions consistent with the question, How does the environment impact peer interactions during free-choice time? might be the following: (1) integrate tables into centers; (2) put two sets of contact paper "feet" on the floor at each side of the water table; (3) have one or two sociodramatic props, such as a farm or car wash in the block area; or (4) arrange two easels side by side in the art area. The team may decide to try one change in each room or have several classrooms make the same change. The potential consequences of all experiments must be carefully considered prior to the trial period. The school leader should be consulted throughout the design phase.

Teams are encouraged to have a mechanism to help them coordinate the actions of their team members. The Action Plan Grid, depicted on the following chart, is one way to document action, individual responsibilities, and results.

Figure 15: **Action Plan Grid**

Hayfield Elementary School
Action Plan Grid for Peer Interaction Team

What do we want to do?	What actions do we need to take?	Who is responsible for each action?	By When?	Observation
Change one part of the environment in each room	Room 14: Integrate tables into art, literacy, housekeeping, and discovery centers	Lyn	12/1	Table in art area needs to be much bigger. More sharing at tables than on floor.
	Room 15: Put contact paper feet on the floor at each side of the water table.	Marta	12/1	Works great for crowd control.
	Room 16: Coordinate the sociodramatic props in the block area with the current theme.	Vibha	12/1	Cleanup is much easier. Also easier to facilitate theme-related language.
	Room 17: Arrange two art easels side by side in the art area.	Christine	12/1	Not much use in the first week.

Observe and document results

Observing and documenting results feed the group reflection process. Members of the group are encouraged to gather ongoing data that answer the question, What is happening? Methods of documentation might include photos, video, anecdotal records, work samples, interviews, and surveys. Whenever possible, teams should encourage parents and professionals representing different roles and disciplines to offer their perspectives on the experiment. Having a variety of individuals observe and document the results of the experiment adds richness and depth to the data.

During the experiment stage, the peer interaction group at Hayward Elementary changed the environment in the art area in one classroom. Team members labeled the art supplies and set them out on accessible shelves; placed two double easels side by side; and put a large table with four chairs in the middle of the art area. Peer interactions were documented using anecdotal notes and photographs. After a few weeks, the team made similar changes in all its classrooms and documented the results by videotaping peer interactions. After reviewing and discussing the video, the team refined its interventions.

Question for Documenting Results
What is happening?

Stage 4: Reflect

> *Reflection is the gift we give ourselves, not passive thought that lolls aimlessly in our minds, but an effort we must approach with rigor, with some purpose in mind, and in some formal way, so as to reveal the wisdom embedded in our experience.* (Killion and Todnem 1991, p. 14)

Real learning occurs in analyzing actions or experiments. This analysis deepens understanding of work and informs discussions and decisions about future practice. The function of individual reflection is to inquire more deeply into one's self and one's actions. The function of team reflection is to consider multiple perspectives and glean insights that will drive future action. Openness to the thoughts of others and the freedom to express oneself are crucial to the team reflection process. Failed experiments should not result in blame; rather, failure provides an opportunity to delve deeper as a team into the question being considered.

Individual reflection

Because individual reflection provides the food for group reflection, it is an ideal place to begin the reflective process. By looking at the data, the actual results of the experiment can be compared with the anticipated results: "I thought that would happen, but in actuality, this happened. What does that tell me?"

Individual Reflection Questions
Did I fulfill my intent?
What did I learn?
How has my perspective changed as a result of this experience?

Keeping a personal journal of observations and insights is a powerful mechanism for individual reflection. Several formats to guide personal reflection are listed below.

- 3-2-1 REFLECTION: Participants are asked to document their thoughts. Ideas asked to be documented can vary depending on the purpose.
  - 3-things I learned
  - 2-ideas I want to pursue
  - 1-question I have
- WHAT, WHAT, WHAT: Participants are asked to answer a variety of "what"questions. Questions can vary depending on the purpose.
  - **What** did I learn that was helpful?
  - **What** challenges did I encounter?
  - **What** got me through them?
  - **What** did I learn in the process?
- OBSERVATIONS AND INTERPRETATIONS: This format is particularly useful when observing a child or peer.The observer is encouraged to both document observations and examine personal interpretations of the situation.

My thoughts and interpretations were...	*What I observed was...*

Group reflection

Group reflection unfolds in many different ways. The lesson learned by one team member often stirs new thinking in other team members. The collective capacity of the group to listen, think, and invent new practices is often surprising. The peer interaction team at Hayward Elementary shared results by watching the video together and then comparing what actually happened with what it thought would happen. Then one team member reported results on a specific child and asked others to help her interpret the results. Some members needed more time to collect results, but all seemed inspired to keep going after reaping the benefits of the group reflection time.

Diversity of perspective also enriches the reflective process as each professional contributes a unique way of viewing the learning process. For example, a team comprised of a regular classroom teacher, a learning disabilities specialist, and an occupational therapist will probably generate a broader range of questions, reflections, and strategies about a specific dilemma than a more homogeneous team, such as a grade-level team. Chapter VII, "Tools for Learning," includes *Think, Pair, Share*, an activity for group reflection.

Group Reflection Questions
What did we accomplish?
What would we do differently?
How does this inform our next step?
What was important to us as learners?

Stage 5: Share

> *True professionals engage in disciplined inquiry: they test their theories, share their results, and, consequently, learn from one another.* (Sagor 1995, p. 25)

This stage offers an opportunity for learning teams to share insights about the knowledge they have acquired and about the process of learning together. The sharing of insights helps build the capacity of all staff in the school to better serve children and their families. As learning teams gain expertise in their topic of study, they become in-house consultants and resources to the school community, and are able to share their new knowledge and skills. Staff members develop an increased sense of pride about who they are as a community.

The sharing of insights can occur in many ways, including a slide show, video, workshop discussion group, newsletter, and/or a group presentation. Some groups may prefer to use a poster session format in which groups display their information and the staff roam from table to table to gather information and ask questions. Regardless of the process, the sharing of insights challenges the teams to synthesize their work and organize it into a format that colleagues can understand. The synthesizing and articulating experience helps bring the learning to a higher level of understanding. As they go through the process, many teams come to realize they are no longer replicating someone else's ideas, but rather they have constructed a strategy that is unique to their situation and that meets the needs of their children. The sense of being able to invent best practice rather than just replicate the ideas of others is empowering.

Questions to Help Discuss Collaborative Work
What has our team accomplished, created, or learned?
How did we accomplish this?
What impact does our work have on teachers, children, and families?
What next steps might we take?

At Hayward Elementary, the peer interaction group decided to have an informal discussion after school to share insights. The group invited the members of the early childhood program in their school, including preschool through first grade staff and specialists, as well as teachers from community preschool programs. The peer interaction strategies were shared and the results were discussed. The attendees actively participated by relating their experiences using peer interaction strategies and seeking more information about the strategies being presented.

This stage also offers an opportunity for teams to share lessons learned about collaborative learning. John Browne, Chief Economic Officer of British Petroleum, advises that every time an action or experience is repeated, it should be critiqued to see how it can be done more efficiently and effectively the next time (Prokesch 1997). If collaborative learning is to become part of the professional development process, staff must take time to examine and refine their ability to learn collaboratively.

Questions to Reflect on the Collaborative Learning Process
What did we learn about "learning collaboratively"?
How has collaborative learning enhanced the capacity of our team to provide quality instruction to our children?

Final Thoughts

In *A Simpler Way*, Wheatley and Kellner-Rogers (1996) share this story:

> *The tower-building termites of Africa and Australia accomplish little when they act alone; they dig only lowly piles of dirt. But as they attract other termites to their vicinity, a collective forms. As a group, they become builders of immense towers—engineering marvels filled with arches, tunnels, air conditioning systems, and specialized chambers. These intricate towers are the largest structures on earth if you consider the size of their builders. But if we observed only the individual termites, we could never predict what they do as a collective. It wouldn't matter how long we observed them as individuals.* (p. 68)

The authors assert that, like the termites, we can't predict what we might accomplish as a collective. We discover what we are capable of as we go along.

Joining a collaborative learning team is rather like taking a leap of faith. Team members have some guarantee that the group is going to learn about something that it is "more or less" interested in. But how the experiment is going to turn out or how the group is going to function as a learning team remains unknown. On the other side of these doubts is the possibility that something wonderful will happen…maybe the team will find a better way to help kids and families by using a new transition process or will help children with ADD become more successful in school. Wonderful things can happen for children and families as a result of the collaborative learning process. Yet creating miraculous results for children and families is not the whole story. Other miracles occur as a result of the collaborative learning process: Staff get to know each other in new and different ways, parents become respected members of professional learning teams, hierarchical boundaries between teaching roles are dissolved, and an increased empathy for difficulties across grade levels and throughout the school emerges. What each collaborative learning team accomplishes as a collective cannot be predicted by observing the individuals on the team. In the collaborative learning process, the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. By working together, something greater can be created. The collaborative learning process is a method for releasing the synergy that resides in all our schools. Let's not waste it.

Ramona Wright, a preschool special education teacher in Fairfax County, Virginia, Public Schools, drafted this chapter. Holly Blum, an early childhood curriculum and integration specialist in Fairfax County, Virginia, Public Schools, and Penelope Wald, Project Director for Project REALIGN, The George Washington University, further developed the concepts.

VI: Enhancing Capacity to Learn

Learning collaboratively is a complex process that requires learners to understand themselves, their motives, thoughts, and beliefs, as well as the motives, thoughts, and beliefs of others. It also requires merging of individual interests into a collective aspiration. Finally, it requires a group "work ethic" or way of behaving that creates a bond of trust, belonging, and purposefulness among group members.

These complexities are more easily addressed when the individuals involved in collaborative learning take time to build relationships and to plan a method for learning together. Learners may decide to establish ground rules or specific communication guidelines. They may adopt processes that support generative thinking and reflection. This chapter focuses on tools and techniques that support groups in creating powerful ways of relating to each other.

Developing Interdependence

Collaborative learning necessitates interaction among groups of individuals. The potential of the interactions varies significantly depending on the degree of interdependence among group members. Interdependence is defined by Steven Covey (1989) as "the paradigm of *we*—we can do it, we can cooperate, we can combine our talents and abilities and create something greater together" (p. 49). He goes on to say, "Interdependence opens up worlds of possibilities for deep, rich, meaningful associations, for geometrically increased productivity, for serving, for contributing, for learning, for growing" (p. 187).

Developing interdependence within a group is a time-consuming process that is enhanced when each team member possesses a solid understanding of one's self. Who am I? What do I believe? and What am I willing to contribute? are important questions for each individual to reflect upon. This self-knowledge is then combined with looking outward—noticing the gifts and talents of others as well as valuing the diversity of thought and experience expressed by the group. Understanding ourselves and understanding others support collaborative learning teams in developing interdependence.

Understanding Self

Deeply held beliefs, values, and assumptions exert a powerful influence on our thoughts and actions (Caine and Caine 1997) and form our personal worldview. Our worldview is rooted in life experiences that stretch back to our early years. These experiences create a lens through which new thoughts and experiences are processed.

Our worldview or way of seeing influences our interpretation of the daily events in our lives. From the many stimuli that are constantly bombarding our senses, we pay attention to the stimuli we consider important. We select these stimuli because they are of interest to us. They may be compatible with our underlying assumptions and, therefore, affirming; or they may be incompatible, therefore creating a sense of disequilibrium. The following example demonstrates the way the same stimuli can affirm two different sets of assumptions or worldviews: Two teachers are watching the same children play. The first teacher sees the children exploring their world as they collect sticks, dig with them, test their trajectory, and hear the sounds they make. The other teacher sees the children out of control as they collect sticks, spear them into the ground, throw them blindly, and bang them on the playground equipment. The worldview of the first teacher is shaped by her belief that children learn through active exploration. The worldview of the second is based on the belief that young children with sticks are dangerous. Each teacher has processed the stimuli in a way that is congruent with her personal worldview and is likely to take action based on the meaning she has attributed to the situation—the first teacher might expand the child's thinking while the second might briskly outlaw the use of sticks.

Personal worldviews exist below the level of awareness where they often remain unexamined and untested. Examining and talking about our personal worldviews is a difficult task, particularly as we mature and our perceptions become buried in years of collected experiences. An understanding of how our past shapes our current actions and decisions is key to understanding ourselves. By identifying the frame through which we routinely view an experience, we become more aware of the assumptions that shape our views. For example, I may perceive a colleague as difficult to deal with on the basis of past experiences. Because of that perception, I view many of her comments such as, "I don't understand your idea," as negative, unsupportive, and challenging. Once I realize that I listen to her through a negative lens, I have a new freedom to choose how I interpret what she says—I am better able to really listen to what she is saying rather than reactivate my past feeling and experiences. Understanding ourselves requires us to identify and "own" the assumptions and beliefs that shape our worldview. In the process of making our worldview more visible to ourselves and others, we increase our capability to modify or let go of those assumptions that no longer serve us well.

Personal reflection heightens our awareness of the beliefs and assumptions that shape our worldview and guide our actions. Charlotte Roberts (Senge and colleagues 1994, p. 396) suggests a few questions that might lead to reflective thinking about our motives for action. The asking and answering of these questions may break up some of the biases and unquestioned assumptions that individuals bring to a group discussion.

- *What strong opinions do you hold about this topic? Where did these opinions come from?*
- *What observable data can you bring to this discussion?*
- *Are you willing to be influenced?*
- *What is your vision for a satisfactory outcome for this issue?*

Understanding Others

To know one's self is wisdom, but to know one's neighbor is genius.

Minna Antrim

No two individuals are exactly alike. When people have similar histories, experiences, or education, compatibility is often anticipated. When differences are apparent, struggle and contention are often expected. Yet we know the presence of different points of view within a group can actually lead to creative solutions.

In a collaborative learning environment, the voicing of different perspectives is encouraged, yet an element of risk accompanies the unveiling of one's thinking in a group of colleagues. An essential ingredient in collaborative learning environments is an atmosphere of trust. Trust in this context refers to the safety level in the group. In a trusting environment, individuals know that all of their ideas and beliefs are respected, valued, and appreciated. A willingness to consider the diverse opinions of others in their group is expected. Members are able to speak openly, to express their opinions and beliefs without loss of status or the fear of reprisal. In a trusting environment, individuals are safe to say what's on their mind, seek the counsel of others, and experiment with new ideas. This environment offers a place where judgment about spoken communication and actions are suspended. Such an atmosphere invites participation. The following elements are present in environments characterized by high levels of trust:

- **Openness**—inviting all group members to participate by offering information, ideas, thoughts, feelings, and reactions.
- **Sharing**—offering materials and resources to help the group move toward its goal.

- **Acceptance**—communicating positive regard to other group members about their contributions to the work.
- **Support**—recognizing the strengths and capabilities of group members.
- **Cooperative intention**—expecting all members to function cooperatively and collaboratively to achieve the group purpose.

Developing a trusting atmosphere occurs little by little. The following activities encourage the building of trust by asking individuals to share information about themselves:

- MY TREASURE BOX: This team activity brings events that have shaped our lives to the forefront. Team members fill boxes or bags with objects and pictures that have significance to them and then share with the group their special items and the reasons they chose them. The explanation of choices begins to disclose the values and beliefs of the team members.
- SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES: Two people, paired together, are asked to name something about each other that is the same and something that is different. For example, the choice could be a physical attribute, a philosophy, a historical fact. This begins the connecting process by acknowledging sameness and difference and foreshadows how difficult it can be for group members to talk about themselves and about differences.
- SELF-DISCLOSURE (Sapon-Shevin 1992, p. 30): The questions in this activity encourage risk taking and personal exposure by asking individuals to respond to more value-laden questions—questions that discuss individual strengths and weaknesses. In answering these questions participants may find complementary skills and interests.
  - What are three things I am really good at?
  - What are three things I have trouble with?
  - What are some ways I can help people?
  - What are some things I need help with and what kind of help would I like?

The embracing of individual differences is another component of understanding others. Seeing differences as a contribution rather than a detriment brings a sense of value to the uniqueness of each person in the group. The presence of positive regard encourages members to share their passions and idiosyncrasies, and stimulates the creativity that arises from full engagement and self-expression. Learning explodes when team members are free to contribute to and learn from the diverse perspectives in their group.

- CREATING A TEAM SCULPTURE: This activity emphasizes the contributions each person brings to the team and ties them together into a whole. Teams are asked to create a

sculpture that represents their team's identity—its diversity, commonalties, and accomplishments. Examples of materials that can be used in this activity include a sheet of foamcore or cardboard for each team, styrofoam pieces, pipe cleaners, clothes pins, yarn, string, ribbon, markers, colored and textured papers, stickers, glue, toothpicks, and tape. Steps in the process are as follows:

- Each member shares a personal trait.
- Members discuss traits, looking for similarities and differences.
- Members translate their ideas into a sculpture that represents their team's identity.
- Members title their sculpture.
- Each team shares the sculpture with other teams.

- LET'S STRING ALONG (Scannell and Newstrom 1991, p. 287): This activity brings to light the interdependent nature of our work and elucidates the importance of having a versatile, diverse group of coworkers. Each group has a ball of string or yarn, and group members stand in a circle. One group member holds the ball of string and ties the end to his or her wrist. He or she throws the ball of string to someone whom he or she is dependent upon and states the nature of that dependency. The process continues by members holding the string and throwing the ball to different members of the group.

Developing a sense of interdependence requires that we come to know ourselves, our biases, and our assumptions; that we trust each other enough to share personal viewpoints, experience, and information; and that we come to embrace and celebrate our differences.

Communication Norms That Support Collaborative Learning

Clearly stated communication norms contribute to an atmosphere of trust when people are learning collaboratively. Communication norms are shared expectations about how group members will communicate with each other. They provide guidelines that support collaborative exploration, discovery, and reflection.

In many groups, members talk "at" one another. Communication consists of each member presenting his/her point of view and defending it with more thoughts when challenged. In this talking "at" model, the speaker's work is the skillful display of his/her ideas; the group's work is to choose the best of the ideas presented. Conversely, collaborative learning relies on the ability of team members to talk "with" each other, working together to understand and mold the group's many ideas into a new whole.

Belenky and colleagues (1986) have named these two types of talk: didactic talking and really talking. Didactic talking offers little or no attempt among group members to combine their thoughts and ideas to acquire new levels of understanding. The practice of really talking asks group members to share ideas in a way that ideas can grow. Really talking happens when members share from deep within their own experience and embrace the ideas and experiences of others. Collaborative learning flourishes in an environment filled with really talking. This section will discuss five communication norms that facilitate really talking:

- Listen carefully.
- Share relevant information.
- Develop shared meaning.
- Make assumptions explicit.
- Decide by consensus.

A word of warning is offered before discussing the specific communication norms. Communication norms cannot be imposed on a group. The group, as a group, draws forth norms that are meaningful for it. The norms are based on the values, expectations, and past experiences of the group members. Communication norms must be clear to all members. Once norms are identified, they should be practiced to ensure that all group members can recognize and use them in conversation. Groups increase their ability to use the norms masterfully when a time and method for group reflection and feedback is incorporated into their ongoing work. *Communication Norms for Collaborative Groups,* found in Chapter VII, "Tools for Learning," is a tool that can be used by groups to explore effective guidelines for communication.

Listen Carefully

Listen
I do not know if you have ever examined how you listen,
it doesn't matter to what, whether to a bird, to the wind in the leaves,
to the rushing waters, or how you listen in a dialogue with yourself,
to your conversation in various relationships with your intimate friends,
your wife or husband. . .
If we try to listen, we find it extraordinarily difficult
because we are always projecting our opinions and ideas,
our prejudices, our background, our inclinations, our impulses;
when they dominate we hardly listen at all to what is being said. . .
In that state there is no value at all. One listens and therefore learns,

only in a state of attention, a state of silence,
in which this whole background is in abeyance, is quiet;
then, it seems to me, it is possible to communicate. . .
Real communication can only take place where there is silence.
Krishnamurti

Listening carefully demonstrates respect for the ideas and thoughts of others. Senge and colleagues (1994) describe this intense listening as "the art of developing deeper silences in yourself, so you can slow your mind's hearing to your ears' natural speed and hear beneath the words to their meaning" (p. 377). Listening carefully requires the purposeful pursuit of meaning beneath the words—a listening for the contribution in each other's speaking rather than for the assessment or judgment of what is being said. This deeper level of listening asks listeners to set their thoughts aside while they attempt to understand the message from the speaker's point of view.

- SAY SOMETHING ABOUT IT: This activity provides participants some insights into their listening. A leader brings an interesting object to the circle of participants. As the object is passed around the circle, each person is instructed to say something about the object. Typically, the participants will be thinking about what they are going to say rather than listening to the comments of others. As the object continues to be passed, a shift often occurs when the comments begin building upon one another. For example, if a pencil was being passed, initial comments might be "it's yellow," "it's made of wood," "you write with it," etc. After a while related comments begin to emerge, such as "I will write Emma a letter with the pencil," and "I will address the envelope using the pencil." This shift represents the group beginning to listen and think as a team rather than as individuals.
- WHAT'S ON MY MIND: A leader divides the group into pairs and gives one person, the speaker, a topic to speak on. The speaker has five minutes to talk about the topic without deviating. The other person is the listener, but he is listening to the thoughts going through his head. The listener must say those thoughts out loud as the speaker is talking about the topic. This very noisy activity confirms for participants that a large percentage of their brain is not focused on listening but is busy having other thoughts.
- APPRECIATIVE PARTNER STATEMENTS: This activity reaffirms the difficulty of listening, especially when the topic is you. It is done in pairs. One person makes an appreciative partner statement to the other person and then vice versa, moving back and forth for three to five minutes. No comments on the statements are permitted. Partners are inclined to comment on the statement with a defensive response: "Oh, I really didn't

do that" or "It wasn't that much work." The trick is to control your "automatic" responses so you can listen and receive the acknowledgment, yet not comment on it.

Instrumental in establishing a culture of respect and trust, careful listening sends a message that each idea from each individual brings value to the group conversation—that each idea is treated with respect regardless of agreement or disagreement. Senge (1994), in *The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook*, suggests some guidelines for listening carefully.

- Stop talking both to others and yourself! Learn to quiet the voice within.
- Try to imagine the other person's viewpoint.
- Show honest, intent interest in the speaker.
- Consider nonverbal behavior to aid in establishing meaning beyond what is spoken.
- Listen for implicit as well as explicit meanings. Question your interpretations of those meanings.
- Speak affirmatively while listening. Avoid evaluative, critical, or disparaging comments at the time the message is being sent.
- Rephrase what the speaker has told you periodically to ensure your understanding of the message.
- Remember to stop talking as all techniques for deep and careful listening depend on this silence (p. 391).

Share Relevant Information

Information is the material of learning. Group members bring a depth and diversity of information to group conversations. Groups greatly benefit from this wealth of information, especially when the expectation is that all information relevant to the topic is publicly shared. Barriers exist to sharing information among team members. Feelings of inferiority or lack of status may create a reluctance to share information with the group. Members may be shy, reluctant to speak in public, or assume that everybody knows what they know. Others may refuse to make the effort to effectively share relevant information or they may have controversial information that they are afraid to share (Lumsden and Lumsden 1993; Weiss 1994).

Sharing relevant information means offering ideas that contribute to the group discussion even when they do not support a personal idea or perspective. For example, a staff member may want to attend a professional development conference on the day her team has planned a field trip. If she shares this, the team may encourage her not to go to the conference. Sharing

all relevant information means telling the team about the conflict, even though the information may reduce her chance of being able to go to the conference. The voicing of multiple perspectives is a good indicator that group members are sharing all relevant information.

Information is only valuable if it is shared and understood by all group members. Information may be sabotaged if people use language such as, "I may be wrong but...." In this example, the group's attention is likely to be diverted to agreeing or disagreeing with the speaker rather than listening to the information. Feelings are also relevant information to share. Feelings may be about the topic under discussion or about the way a topic is being discussed.

Develop Shared Meaning

> *Shared meaning is really the cement that holds society together and you could say that the present society has some very poor quality cement. If you make a building with very low quality cement, it cracks and falls apart. We really need the right cement, the right glue...and that is shared meaning.* (Bohm 1990, p. 17)

A lack of shared meaning is a primary reason for failed communication in groups. This lack of shared meaning can relate to words and ideas as well as to the purpose and tasks of a group. The need to come to agreement on the meaning of words is an ongoing process in collaborative learning groups. Because we, as speakers, are perfectly clear about what our words and ideas mean, we often assume other group members have the same clarity. We forge ahead making our point rather than pausing for a moment to check for understanding. Unfortunately, the entire group does not necessarily have the same understandings. For example, I might say I am interested in creating quality instructional programs. I have a clear image of what quality means, but the other group members might not share that image. Quality may look totally different to them. If we don't pause to explore what quality means to each person, we have no guarantee we are advocating for the same goal.

There are several ways to encourage creating shared meaning. One way is to slow down the conversation so individuals have time to explore meanings. The following strategies may help slow down the pace of a conversation:

- Asking for clarification of an idea or word.
- Asking other members to paraphrase the idea that was just expressed.
- Asking group members to discuss the pros and cons of an idea.
- Stopping and defining the word or idea when it first enters the discussion.

For example, when the word "consensus" is used, one team member offered this definition for the group to consider: "You used the word 'consensus.' To me consensus means unanimous agreement and not majority agreement. Is that what it means to you?" (Schwarz 1994)

Another way to create shared meaning is to use the four-step process adapted from the work of Russo and Giblin (1996, p. T-2).

Step 1: Each team member offers an interpretation of the task or concept.

Step 2: Team members question each other's ideas.

Step 3: Team members modify their ideas.

Step 4: Team members agree on a shared meaning of the task or concept.

Make Assumptions Explicit

A teacher approaches a colleague to talk about a student with a behavior problem. The colleague listens and then offers several suggestions. The teacher is quick with a response: "I've tried the first one before. It didn't work, and the other one is just not my style." This response left the colleague feeling judged and cut off. What happened? The teacher described a problem. The colleague suggested solutions. The teacher rejected the solutions. This conversation was a solution-driven conversation convened for the moment to address a crisis or problem. Attention was given only to potential solutions, not to the assumptions associated with the problem. Conversations that are held at the "what-should-we-do" level tend to look like a ping-pong game with answers being batted back and forth. What is missing in a solution-driven conversation is the opportunity to examine the thoughts or the assumptions that created the problem. Every problem is based on a set of assumptions. Assumptions are ideas that are treated like "the truth," but in reality they are merely ideas, created by people at some point in time. In our example, the student's behavior was a problem. The problem is based on a set of assumptions about appropriate ways to behave in school. A different teacher might embrace a different set of assumptions and the student's behavior might not be a problem in that class. Once underlying assumptions are identified and stated, discrepancies in thinking among team members can be more easily determined.

Making assumptions explicit is akin to the notion of "suspending assumptions" found in dialogue. Dialogue is a method of discourse "in which group members seek to understand one another's viewpoints and deeply held assumptions" (Garmston and Wellman 1998, p. 31). As groups engage in dialogue, members are encouraged to identify and "suspend" their assumptions. In this context, suspend does not mean to hold back or temporarily dis-

miss assumptions, but rather it means to hold them out in front, like an object, so all can see them clearly. Senge (1990) suggests that individuals have their assumptions "'hanging in front,' constantly accessible to questioning and observation" (p. 243).

When individuals are engaged in collaborative learning, examining the thinking behind their ideas can help illuminate underlying assumptions. Explaining one's thinking can take many forms: (1) telling others the reasons for doing or suggesting something, (2) explaining the way a certain point of view came to be, or (3) describing the theory upon which a strategy is based.

Inquiring into the thinking of others can also illuminate assumptions. When inquiring, the listener asks for clarification to more fully understand the speaker's thoughts. In collaborative learning a clear understanding of the speaker's point of view should precede the voicing of agreement, disagreement, or another point of view. This idea resonates with Covey's (1989) thinking in *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, "Seek first to understand... then to be understood" (p. 235). *Left-Hand Column*, in Chapter VII, "Tools for Learning," is designed to help individuals and groups identify and discuss underlying assumptions and beliefs.

Decide by Consensus

This chapter and this book both focus on creating a space and process in which teams are free to engage in collaborative learning—free to explore, inquire, expand, and experiment. Although most of these words are open-ended, ignoring the need for teams to make decisions, reach agreement, and take action would be foolish. Every team needs an agreed-upon decision-making process. We propose consensus as the optimal decision-making process for collaborative learning teams.

Making decisions by consensus means that "everyone in the group freely agrees with the decision and will support it. If even one person cannot agree with a proposed decision, the group does not have a consensus. Consensus ensures that team members' choices will be free...and that they will be internally committed to the choices" (Schwarz 1994, p. 84). When the consensus process is used, the group more fully owns the final decision, thereby fostering a more accepting atmosphere for the change.

Power among group members is equalized when consensus is used as a decision-making process because all members must speak their concerns and express their support for a decision. In a group situation it often takes courage to state one's views and inquire more deeply

into the thoughts of others. The effective use of the other communication norms such as listening carefully, sharing relevant information, developing shared understanding, and making assumptions explicit increases the likelihood that a group will reach consensus amicably and in a timely manner.

Testing for consensus is often necessary to determine if a group is nearing consensus. Some methods for testing for consensus are suggested by Judy Olson-Ness (1994).

- Look at each person individually and ask, "Will you support this decision?"
- Use the five-to-fist test for agreement, with five meaning "yes" and fist meaning "no."
- Have each person place a marker on a consensus continuum chart.
- Ask each member's opinion in a round robin.

Optimal times to test for consensus are as follows:

- The discussion has gone on for a long time.
- Ideas are being repeated.
- Confusion exists about the direction of the discussion.
- Time is running out.
- Options need to be eliminated.

Schwarz (1994) offers a procedure for reaching consensus: "When a group thinks it is close to reaching consensus, one member should state the decision under consideration, and then each member should say whether he or she agrees. This avoids the mistake of assuming that silence means agreement" (p. 84). *The Pyramid* in Chapter VII, "Tools for Learning," is a method to help groups reach consensus.

Group Practices That Support Collaborative Learning

Establish Ground Rules

Ground rules are specific and concrete rules and procedures that guide the way collaborative learning groups function. Ground rules provide parameters for team meeting functions such as scheduling, attendance, agenda development, and members' roles and responsibilities. Ground rules may specify behavioral expectations, such as respecting individual contributions and full participation of all team members. They may delineate procedures for group processes such as brainstorming, decision making, or recruiting new members.

Having teams generate their own ground rules provides the opportunity to discuss and make explicit the expectations members have for one another. Stress often builds among team members around interpersonal behaviors or "pet peeves," such as the person who is constantly late, the member who dominates the conversation, or the phone calls that continually interrupt the flow of conversation. When ground rules are clearly articulated and responsibility is given to the group members to enforce them, groups find they function with less stress and greater productivity. *Ground Rules,* in Chapter VII, "Tools for Learning," offers a process for groups to discuss and identify relevant and meaningful ground rules.

Figure 16: **Sample Ground Rules for Meetings**

1. Start and end on time.
2. Stay on the task—avoid side conversations or other work.
3. Minimize interruptions—take messages and make phone calls at breaks.
4. Allow everyone an equal voice.
5. Listen to increase understanding rather than to think about what you want to say next.
6. Honor promises and commitments made. Follow through on action plans.
7. Be aware and monitor how much air space you and others are using. Notice patterns. (Bailey 1996)

Some group processes, such as brainstorming, problem solving, or decision making, also need ground rules or agreed-upon procedures to expedite their use by a group. Below is a sample of brainstorming ground rules.

Figure 17: **Sample Ground Rules for Brainstorming**

1. Share ideas in a round-robin fashion.
2. Avoid negative or judgmental comments.
3. Welcome wild ideas.
4. Focus on quantity, not quality.
5. Keep the sessions short—three to five minutes.
6. Designate a recorder to write key phrases.

Explore Trust and Task Roles

The beginning of this chapter discusses the importance of trust within a group. Trust is half of what it takes to be an effective and efficient group. The other half is the ability to accomplish the task. Roles that enhance the levels of trust and task in a group have been identified. For example, summarizing is a task role that is responsible for clearly restating what the group has discussed, while gatekeeping is a trust role that makes sure all group members have an opportunity to share their ideas. Figures 18 and 19 delineate some task and trust roles (Olson-Ness 1994; Johnson and Johnson 1994).

Figure 18: **Task Roles That Support Group Functioning**

Information or opinion seeker—requests facts, seeks relevant information, asks for suggestions and ideas.

Recorder—charts relevant information during meeting, restates groups' comments or decisions to ensure understanding and agreement.

Timekeeper—ensures each agenda item has a set time; keeps group apprised of time (gives 5-minute warning); when one minute is left, asks group members if they want to allot more time to discussion or summarize and move on.

Facilitator—helps group set the agenda, assigns roles for meeting, keeps discussion on topic, reminds group of ground rules and norms, creates the space for action to occur in the meeting.

Summarizer—restates what the group has discussed, pulls together related ideas or suggestions, organizes ideas so group will know what has been said, checks for understanding and agreement.

Figure 19: **Trust Roles That Support Group Functioning**

Gatekeeper—ensures that all members of the group have an opportunity to share, asks for the opinion of quiet group members, encourages talkative members to be listeners, keeps communication flowing.

Encourager—is friendly, warm, and responsive to others; accepts and acknowledges the contribution of members; encourages others to speak.

Compromiser—in the case of an impasse, clearly states the different ideas that have been expressed and asks group to look for common ground; offers compromises for opposing points of view; is willing to yield when it is necessary for progress to be made.

Reflector—senses feelings, moods, and relationships within group; shares own feelings with the group.

Standard Setter—reminds group of ground rules and communication norms, helps group reflect on the use of rules and norms, informs new members of group standards.

Having team members focus on both trust and task roles has several benefits. Two obvious benefits are a higher level of trust and performance among group members. A less obvious benefit is a leveling of the hierarchical structure inherent in the roles of parent, teacher, administrator, and assistant teacher. This hierarchy is often unconsciously transferred to the collaborative learning situation. By assigning members the roles of summarizer, gatekeeper, or recorder, a message is sent that all members are equally important to the group's functioning. When a group is first "trying on" trust and task roles, members may decide to blindly choose the roles at the beginning of a meeting, or they may select roles that represent their personal style and comfort level.

Document Information

Information generated by a group needs to be documented. Meeting agendas and meeting notes (1) provide a record of topics addressed, decisions made, and assigned responsibilities and (2) serve as an information dissemination mechanism for individuals who could not attend the meeting.

Figure 20: **Sample Meeting Agenda**

Meeting Date:		**Facilitator:**		
Members Present:		**Recorder:**		
		Timekeeper:		
Agenda Item	**Time**	**Decisions**	**Who**	**When**

Next Group Meeting Date, Time, and Place:

Agenda Items:

Reflection on Group Functioning:

There are many methods of keeping meeting notes. One is to keep a running record of the discussions and decisions and then type and distribute the information. Having a laptop computer at the meeting has made this approach more efficient. A more succinct method is to record only group decisions, individual responsibilities, and due dates. During the meeting, it is helpful if decisions are recorded on chart paper so all members can see the decisions and review them prior to the conclusion of the meeting. The chart paper notes are then typed and distributed to each member after the meeting. Figure 20 depicts a sample meeting agenda.

Reflection on Group Process

Learning how to learn together is essential to the work of collaborative learning groups. Often, too much attention is given to what group members are doing rather than to how they are doing it. As stated earlier in this chapter, the balance between trust and task, between focusing on relationships and on accomplishments, is key to successful group functioning. The probability that a team will work on the same task again is minimal. The probability that the team will work collaboratively again is much greater. Therefore, teams must continually evaluate and refine how they communicate, how they run meetings, how they share information—how they function as a team. Group reflection is a means for group members to examine what they are doing well and what needs to be improved, and to set priorities for enhancing their collaborative learning.

Groups can improve their ability to function as a group by setting aside time at each meeting to critique their behavior. Schwarz (1994) suggests groups ask themselves three questions: (1) What ground rules did we use well? (2) What ground rules do we need to improve upon? (3) Exactly what will we do differently next time?

A similar inquiry can be made into the group's use of communication norms. Chapter VII, "Tools for Learning," offers *Communication Patterns,* a tool for recording and sharing group communication patterns during team meetings. An observer diagrams the communication patterns that occur over time and presents the data to the group. Discussion about the flow of communication within the group can significantly contribute to positive team functioning.

Another method of ascertaining the members' level of satisfaction with team functioning is through the Team Functioning Scale, a simple tabulation procedure. The "Why?" Column offers information about the forces that are supporting or inhibiting the group's performance. Team comments can be included in the meeting notes and reviewed at the beginning of the next meeting to reinforce the group learning process.

Figure 21: **Team Functioning Scale**

Scale	Tallies	Why?
7	/ I'm very satisfied with our team's functioning.	
6	///	
5	/	
4	//	
3	/	
2		
1	I'm very dissatisfied with our team's functioning.	

Final Thoughts

We are asking a great deal of individuals who have chosen to use collaborative learning as a vehicle for school improvement. We are asking that they devote time and energy to understand their own beliefs and the beliefs of those around them. We are asking that they engage in meaningful learning as a team. We are asking that they recognize and address the complexities that accompany working collaboratively. These are not simple requests. They involve time, study, and a commitment to improving the way adults relate to each other in a school.

Yet it is becoming more and more apparent that professional collaboration plays a significant role in quality schools. For that reason, we must persist in exploring new and improved ways for professionals in our schools to grow and learn together. Now is the time to pave the way for "best practice" in collaborative learning. In the next generation of schools we must be as attentive to the process of learning together as we are to the content of our professional learning.

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VII: Tools for Learning

Introduction

The tools described in this chapter are activities that are useful in developing professional learning communities. They are described separately here because they are more complex than those described in previous chapters and require a little more detail. Most require some debriefing either during or following the activity and benefit from the use of an experienced facilitator. Several tools are basic process tools and can be used throughout the collaborative learning process.

Each description is composed of the purpose, the basics, the process, and facilitator's notes. Although some adaptations are included in the descriptions, further adaptations may be needed to meet specific audience and learning needs. For example, small-group activities requiring discussion can be used with large audiences by asking participants to discuss the concept or issue with their neighbor. The outcomes may not be exactly the same, but the use of discussion is still captured. The reader is encouraged to use these tools as a starting point and to contribute personal creativity and individualization to enhance them.

TOOL #1 Force Field Analysis (Chapter IV)

Purpose

To identify negative and positive forces that influence the issue being discussed and begin to generate a strategy or plan of action

This process could be used by

- a whole school community to identify the positive or negative forces that impact movement toward its desired state
- a collaborative learning team to analyze positive and negative forces impacting a topic of study

Basics

Number of participants: Large or small group
Time: 30 minutes to 1 hour
Room Arrangement: Participants should be able to read chart or overhead.
Materials: Overhead or large chart; markers

Process

1. The group identifies desired state and describes it at the top of the chart. (See example.)
2. The group develops a list of facilitating (positive) forces, including individual, interpersonal, school, and societal forces, that will help the group move toward the desired state. The group addresses this question: What forces existing both within the school/group and outside of the group will help to make the needed changes?
3. The group develops a list of restraining (negative) forces that may prohibit the group from moving toward the desired state. The group addresses this question: What forces will prevent change from occurring?
4. The group ranks the facilitating forces according to the degree of influence they have on movement toward the desired state.
5. The group rates the top restraining forces according to how easily they can be resolved (number one being most easily resolved). Only identify the forces that the group can influence given the current resources. (See second facilitator note.)

6. The group brainstorms ways to strengthen and enhance the top facilitating forces.
7. The group brainstorms ways to convert the restraining forces into facilitating or neutral forces.

EXAMPLE

Force Field

Desired State: *Interdisciplinary instruction in the classroom*

Facilitating (Positive) Forces *What forces support this?*	**Restraining (Negative) Forces** *What forces are hindering this?*
▮ Some staff willing to team	▮ State-mandated SOL assessments
▮ Some staff with experience	▮ Lack of instructional models and materials for interdisciplinary teaching
▮ District-level encouragement to try	▮ Lack of proximity of participating staff
▮ Best way for kids to learn	▮ No staff development
	▮ No planning time

What will help us move forward?

- Establish outcomes/expectations for the process to reach these expectations.
- Talk with principal about logistical matters such as planning time, staff development, proximity, and materials.
- Visit with staff in schools that have done interdisciplinary instruction at our grade level—if they would be willing to mentor us.

FACILITATOR NOTES

- Johnson and Johnson (1994) claim that reducing the restraining forces is usually a more effective strategy than enhancing the positive or facilitating forces.

- Stephen Covey's discussion on the circle of influence and the circle of concern in *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* is applicable in the ranking and action plan stages of force field analysis. Covey suggests to first work on items that are within the circle of influence—that is, items that can be changed given the current resources. He believes

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that focusing on things that can be improved will ensure success in causing change. Over time the circle of influence will increase. Conversely, he believes that spending time on issues that cannot be changed leads to frustration and impotence. We recommend the facilitator help the group target forces it can influence.

Source: Johnson, D.W., and Johnson, R.P. (1994)

TOOL #2 Probable and Preferred Future (Chapter IV)

Purpose

To generate a short-term action plan for change based on an examination of the gap between a "probable" future and an ideal or "preferred" future

Basics

Number of participants: Large or small group
Time needed: 1 hour
Room Arrangement: Small groups with one wall available for 4' by 16' chart
Materials: Roll of chart paper at least 4' by 16'; markers and tape

Process

1. The facilitator prepares a chart with three columns: Probable Future, Preferred Future, and Action Plan for Change. (See example.)
2. Staff are asked, "Think about the current state of education in your school, your state, and the nation. If the current trends continue, what is the probable future scenario for your school?" Staff first generate their own ideas about the probable future and then work in small groups to collect and refine ideas. Main ideas are then reported to the group and listed in the Probable Future column on the chart.
3. Staff are then asked to brainstorm what they would prefer to have happen in their school. Again, individuals first generate their own list of images for their preferred future and then discuss and refine the list in small groups. Main ideas are then listed in the Preferred Future column.
4. Based on the information in the two columns, staff are asked to generate actions that can be taken by the individuals and by the group to move the school toward its preferred future. Small groups discuss possible actions for change and then pose ideas to the large group. Ideas are recorded in the Action Plan for Change column.

Example

Probable Future	Preferred Future	Action Plan For Change *Implications for the next 6 months.*
▮ Increased use of alternative schooling: charters, vouchers, home schooling ▮ Decline in confidence in public schools ▮ Funding decreased, no bonds passed ▮ Greater gap in schools ability to meet the needs of children and families	▮ Learning environments in schools that are healthy, safe, and exciting; shared responsibility between home and school ▮ Community dialogue about school reform with active, informed, involved citizenry ▮ Increasing interest from corporations for public school support ▮ Technology supports of individualized work ▮ Increased accountability for parents, students, teachers to accomplish stated outcomes	**As individuals** ▮ Begin to collect research on schools with successful reforms (Allison and Myra) ▮ Collect information on our current programs that are successful (Laura) ▮ Talk to community individuals about needed school changes (pairs of staff members to interview identified community stakeholders) **As a group** ▮ Continue rehashing and refining these ideas ▮ Complete assessment of technology capability

Facilitator Notes

- After generating items for the Preferred Future column, staff may need time to discuss any ideas that are unclear, are controversial, or have only minimum support. If opinions about the school's direction for a preferred future differ, the facilitator helps groups identify ideas that have a common base of support. One way to identify ideas that have general support is to give participants two to four dot stickers and have them put dots by the ideas that they feel are most important. The action plan for change is then based on the most supported ideas.

- Completing the Probable and Preferred Future template marks the beginning of the action plan process. After possible action plans for change are suggested, the group must agree to specific actions that they are committed to and have the most leverage for impacting change. Once these actions are selected, specific responsibilities are distributed among the group.
- Establishing an action plan for change may be a very long process and can be scheduled at a later date, allowing participants time to process the discrepancy between the way things are currently and their preferred future. If this process takes two sessions to complete, it is helpful to hang the partially completed chart in the staff lounge to promote further thought and discussion.

Source: Bailey, S. (1996)

TOOL #3 *Affinity* (Chapter IV and V)

Purpose

To group or cluster similar ideas

Basics

Number of participants: Large or small group
Time needed: 1 hour (varies depending on size of group)
Room Arrangement: Room with at least one blank wall that can be used to post ideas; moveable chairs; tables, optional.
Materials: Post-its and pens for all participants

Process

1. Each participant writes on Post-its ideas pertaining to the topic being discussed (one Post-it for each idea).
2. In a round-robin fashion, each participant shares his or her idea with the group and places the Post-it on the wall.
3. As participants continue to share their ideas, similar ideas are clustered together.
4. The group gives a name, title, or category to each "cluster" of ideas.

Facilitator Notes

- This tool is an expedient method for clustering the ideas of individual group members. For example, when defining schoolwide professional development goals in an inclusive school, staff were asked, "How do you need to stretch to increase your capacity to collaboratively offer quality programs for all children in inclusive classrooms?" Responses generated clusters such as facilitating peer interaction, teaching children with challenging behaviors, team teaching, and differentiating instruction. These areas were then translated into school-based professional development goals.
- The *Affinity* exercise can also be used to
  - form collaborative learning teams based on individual learning interests
  - generate a plan for exploring that honors the needs and interests of the individuals
  - identify similar and dissimilar views of a topic being discussed, such as beliefs about how young children learn

- This tool can be conducted "en masse" where a group moves to the "posting wall" and posts ideas without announcing them. Participants are encouraged to read ideas that have already been posted; actively discuss their ideas and the ideas of others as they post; and begin to create clusters of ideas, putting similar ideas together. When the sorting is done, the facilitator reads aloud idea clusters so the group can generate names for the clusters.
- This process can also be done in silence. Participants move to the posting wall, post their ideas, and rearrange ideas into clusters without talking. The absence of talking focuses the group on reading and thinking.
- When working in small groups, a tabletop is a good surface for posting and clustering ideas. For best results, the table should be cleared, with participants sitting evenly spaced around the table.
- When clusters are read aloud, new ideas may be stimulated to add to a cluster, or individuals may decide that an idea belongs in a different cluster.

TOOL #4 Open Space (Chapter V)

Purpose

To assist staff members in (1) identifying a personally meaningful topic for study and (2) forming study groups with staff who share similar interests and questions

Basics

Number of participants: Large group, 20-50 people
Time needed: 1 hour
Room Arrangement: Large open room; moveable chairs; space on at least three walls for charts
Materials: Chart paper

Process

1. **Room preparation:** A large open room is divided into stations with one schoolwide professional development goal posted at each station. The goals are posted on a long strip of paper with four pieces of chart paper mounted side by side below (see example). The charts are titled as follows:

- The Stroll—Interests/concerns
- First Round of Discussion
- Second Round of Discussion
- Topics for Study

Example

Provide individualized instruction for all children in school

The Stroll Interests/Concerns	First Round of Discussion	Second Round of Discussion	Topics for Study

When the group assembles, the facilitator reviews the entire open space process. The use of charts and transition cues are explained and demonstrated, if appropriate.

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2. The Stroll (20 minutes): Individuals randomly circulate to each station in the room and record on The Stroll chart their personal interests and concerns about each professional development goal. For example, with the goal "improve co-teaching skills," one teacher might write, "learn efficient planning strategies" on the chart and another might write, "learn more about models of co-teaching." Teachers are encouraged to add personal ideas to all the goals. After 15 minutes, the facilitator shows the 5-minute warning sign. That is the cue for participants to review the material on all the charts and move to the station that best captures their learning interest.

3. First Round of Discussion (15 minutes): Using moveable chairs, participants cluster in discussion circles at the station that most interests them. Participants share their reason for selecting this station and the things they want to learn about this goal. A recorder notes each person's interests on the First Round of Discussion chart. The group then reflects on what it has heard and whether a specific topic for study has emerged. Any study ideas that emerge from the discussion are posted on the Topics for Study chart.

4. Second Round of Discussion (10 minutes): This is an opportunity for individuals to explore a second area of interest. For the second round of discussion, participants move to a new station, review the work of the previous discussion group, and repeat the discussion process outlined above in step 4. Ideas are recorded on the Second Round of Discussion chart. New ideas emerging from this group are added to the Topics for Study chart.

5. Topics for Study: Individuals move to the station with the professional development goal that most interests them. This is the first step in forming a collaborative learning team. When staff have grouped themselves into learning teams, they note their broad topic for study on chart paper, as well as the team members' names and their personal interests related to the topic. These charts are then shared with the entire staff.

Facilitator Notes:

- Identifying schoolwide professionals development goals precedes the open space exercise. These professional development goals, generated by the entire staff, reflect areas in which staff need to grow to attain 'school vision.
- It is helpful to have a facilitator for each of the topic groups. If a facilitator is not available, an individual from each group should assume the role of facilitator to keep the discussion focused, be sure all ideas are expressed, and document the discussion.

- During the first and second rounds of discussion, the facilitator may want to begin with an open-ended question such as, "What personally attracts you to this topic?"
- Shared understanding among group members is promoted by asking individuals to clarify their thoughts or by checking to see that participants are following the discussion.
- Everyone should be aware of the importance of personal choice before deciding to join a collaborative learning group. It's acceptable for individuals to change their mind and switch to another group.
- Marvin Weisbord and Sandra Janoff in *Future Search* (1995) suggest the following ground rules be posted to help the group understand the free-floating, self-selecting spirit of this process.

GROUND RULES

1. Whatever individuals come are the right people.
2. Whatever happens is the only thing that could happen.
3. "The Law of Two Feet"—If you are not in the right place, use your feet to go to another group.
4. Listen generously—inquire into the ideas of others as often as you express your own ideas.

Sources: Owen, H. (1997)

TOOL #5 *Think, Pair, Share* (Chapter V)

Purpose

To give the participants time to articulate and reflect on their ideas before they present them to a larger group

Basics

Number of participants: Large or small group
Time needed: 10 to 20 minutes depending on group size
Room Arrangement: Seating arrangement that allows two people to talk together
Materials: None

Process

1. At a natural breaking point, participants are asked to stop and think for a minute about the idea, information, or concept presented.
2. After 1 minute, participants are invited to turn to someone on their left or right and share their thoughts or ideas. Each partner has 1 minute to share.
3. After 2 minutes of discussion, participants are invited to share ideas, concerns, and questions with the larger group.

Facilitator Notes

- This process can be used to do the following:
  - Identify important points: the facilitator might say, "What are the two most important points you heard?"
  - Analyze the message: the facilitator might say, "What are you thinking about the speakers' ideas?"
  - Develop shared understanding: the facilitator might say, "What do you believe the speaker is saying?"
  - Apply learning: the facilitator might say, "How might you use this information in your work?"

Source: Garmston, R. and Willman, B. (1998)

TOOL #6 Communication Norms for Collaborative Groups (Chapter VI)

Purpose

To teach communication norms that promote collaboration

Basics

Number of participants: Groups of four to seven individuals
Time needed: 2 hours
Room Arrangement: Tables and chairs for small groups
Materials: "Learning project materials": role sheets (A-H) and five communication norm sheets

Process

1. Setup (5 minutes): Each group, seated around a table, is given directions for a group learning project. For example, a group may be assigned the task of setting up an early childhood environment using wooden blocks of different sizes and colors. The learning project should be open ended, thereby challenging the group to develop shared understanding and agreement about their work.

Facilitator gives role cards (attached) to group members and says, "I have additional information to give to each of you. Please do not share this information with your fellow team members."

Role cards distributed have the following roles on them:

- Withholder (silent but knowing)
- Always confused
- Off topic
- Protector
- Know-it-all
- Yes person

2. Play (10 - 15 minutes): The group proceeds to begin work on its project, with group members acting out their specific roles. The facilitator tells teams they have 15 minutes to complete their project and notes comments, body language, and communication flow.

3. **Debrief** (10 minutes): The teams consider the following questions:

- *How were things going?*
- *Did you encounter any communication problems?*

The facilitator can address questions to specific people (for example, How did you feel, Sue, when Marta continually interrupted you? What did you decide?). The facilitator can contribute observations to stimulate reflection.

4. **Learning** (45 minutes): The groups now look at effective communication norms for teaming and learning. Each of the five norms is described on a separate one-page fact sheet (see attached). Each member of the group takes a norm, reviews it, and prepares to teach it to other group members by completing the activity at the bottom of the sheet. The facilitator can organize cross-team groupings for those individuals who are reviewing the same norm.

After 10-15 minutes, teams reconvene and each person has 5 minutes to describe his or her norm, help the group practice it, and address questions. After 5 minutes, the facilitator moves the group to the next norm. After all norms have been discussed, the group as a whole takes 5-10 minutes for any large group discussions.

5. **Replay** (15 minutes): Using the newly learned communication norms, the groups work again to complete their project. The facilitator can coach members, for example, "Remember to develop shared understanding"; can note use of the norms, for example "By repeating what Marta said, you showed you were listening carefully"; or can take notes to provide feedback after the role-play is finished. Communication behaviors might include asking each other questions, actively seeking consensus, actively listening using clarification and paraphrasing, seeking the input of all the members, and checking for shared understanding. The groups get a 5- and 2-minute warning before ending their role-play. The project should be completed in 15 minutes.

6. **Debrief (15 minutes):** Group members are acknowledged for their work at effective communication. Materials are picked up or moved to the center of the table. A product that emerged is shared with the other groups. Each group discusses these questions:

- *Did you communicate differently this time?*
- *What communication norms did you find helpful?*
- *What communication norms do you want to adopt for your team?*

Facilitator Notes

- If a team has agreed on a set of communication norms, display them in some public way—on a sign or on the agenda page.
- To shorten the activity choose one or two norms to teach during the learning phase.

Communication Norms for Collaborative Groups

Role Cards

Withholder (silent but knowing)

You are an extremely shy person who prefers to work on your own. Unless someone directly asks for your thoughts, you tend not to speak in a group setting. You are aware of the feelings of others around you but are uncomfortable making any overt attempts to be inclusive or empathetic to other group members. You have knowledge that could assist the group in its task but are not comfortable in sharing your information. You tend to fidget in your seat, as a sign of your discomfort, but remain a quiet observer.

Always confused

You are a considerate person who desperately wants to contribute to the work of the team. Your mind tends to wander to other issues; thus, you miss a great deal of the conversation. You tend to ask many questions, often disrupting the flow of the discussion to clarify your own thoughts. You often respond to questions that have already been discussed by the group.

Yes person

You have your own ideas about the task of the team, yet you tend to go along with the ideas of other members. You contribute to the group but with a focus on getting the task accomplished with as little uneasiness as possible. You tend to smile and agree to the ideas of others—even if their ideas contradict each other.

Protector

You are far more concerned with the feelings of individual group members than you are with the task at hand—to the point that you focus solely on feelings and emotions. You consult individuals who appear to be uncomfortable (fidgeting in their seat, confused) in the middle of a conversation to try to assist them. You take on a parent role in the way you encourage all group members to express their opinion—even if they are not interested in speaking. You often rephrase a harsh statement made by another group member in kinder and gentler words.

Know-it-all

You feel very strongly about the direction the activity should take. You are an extremely opinionated person and are often loud and disruptive during a meeting. You are known to interrupt another speaker if you have something you feel is important to say as you feel it is imperative that everyone know your ideas. Your focus is on completing the task at hand in the most expedient manner possible. The feelings and contributions of other members are not important to you.

Off topic

You are excited to see and talk to your colleagues. You are very much a "people person." Spending the day alone in your classroom without other adults to speak with has been frustrating. You take every opportunity in your group meeting to discuss your personal life, children in your class, difficulties you are having with the administration, and other issues with individuals in the group. You are not always aware of the discussion as your mind is focused on personal needs. You tend to interrupt often during the meeting to talk off-topic to another team member.

Communication Norms For Learning Teams

Communication Norms Fact Sheets

Listen carefully

Listening carefully demonstrates respect for the ideas and thoughts of others. Peter Senge and colleagues (1994) describe this intense listening as "the art of developing deeper silences in yourself, so you can slow your mind's hearing to your ears' natural speed, and hear beneath the words to their meaning" (p. 377). Listening carefully requires the purposeful pursuit of meaning beneath the words—a listening for the contribution in each other's speaking rather than assessing or judging what is being said. This deeper level of listening asks listeners to set their thoughts aside while they attempt to understand the message from the speaker's point of view (Chapter VI).

Practice:

- Obtain silence: stop talking to yourself and others.
- Show your interest in what the speaker has to say.
- Try to understand the speakers' point of view.
- Clarify your understanding of the message.
- Question your interpretations.

What are two other techniques you could use to support this norm in your group?

Share relevant information

Sharing relevant information means speaking up if you have ideas and information that will contribute to the group discussion, including facts that do not support your idea or perspective. For example, a staff member may very much want to attend a professional development conference on the day her team has planned a field trip. If she shares this, the team may encourage her not to go to the conference. Sharing all relevant information means telling the team about the conflict, even though the information may reduce her chance of being able to go to the conference (Chapter VI).

Practice:

- Elicit multiple perspectives in the group.
- Share your feelings about the topic.
- Present your information so the message is highlighted, not your feelings about it; for example, if a sentence starts with "This is a stupid idea, but. . .," team member may find themselves contemplating whether they agree or disagree with that statement rather than listening to the information.

What are two other techniques you could use to support this norm in your group?

Develop shared meaning

"Shared meaning is really the cement that holds society together. . ." (Bohm 1990, p. 17). Shared meaning or understanding means that everyone in the group shares the same meaning for words or ideas being expressed in the group. Establishing agreement on the meaning of words is an ongoing process in collaborative learning groups. We often assume that words or ideas expressed over and over in our work or environment hold the same meaning to everyone in the group. For example, one might say that he or she is interested in creating quality instructional programs. The speaker's image of what those programs will look like may not be the same image as other group members. Slowing down the conversation so individuals have time to explore meanings is necessary for the group to develop a shared understanding of the message (Chapter VI).

Practice

- Ask for clarification of an idea or word.
- Ask other members to paraphrase the idea that was just expressed.
- Stop the conversation and define the word or idea under question.

What are two other techniques you could use to support this norm in your group?

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MAKE ASSUMPTIONS EXPLICIT

Every problem is based on a set of assumptions. Assumptions are the ideas that are treated like "the truth," but in reality are merely ideas, created by people at some point in time; for example, different teachers may have different sets of assumptions that guide their response to a student's behavior in school. When the assumptions underlying a problem or an idea are identified and clearly stated, discrepancies in thinking among team members can be more easily identified (Chapter VI).

Practice

- Ask the speaker to explain how he or she arrived at a particular idea.
- Tell others why you are doing or suggesting something.
- Explain how you came to a certain point of view.
- Describe the theory that you are basing your idea on.

What are two other techniques you could use to support this norm in your group?

DECIDE BY CONSENSUS

Making decisions by consensus means that "everyone in the group freely agrees with the decision and will support it. If even one person cannot agree with a proposed decision, the group does not have a consensus. Consensus ensures that team members' choices will be free choices and that they will be internally committed to the choices" (Schwarz 1994, p. 84). When the consensus process is used, the group more fully owns the final decision, thereby fostering a more accepting atmosphere for the change. Testing for consensus is important to be sure that a decision is unanimous and to be sure that an individual's silence is not automatically interpreted as agreement (Chapter VI).

Practice

- Ask group members individually if they support the decision.
- Take a group vote using thumbs up or thumbs down.

What are two other techniques you could use to support this norm in your group?

Source: Russo, E. and Giblin, C. (1996)

TOOL #7 Left-Hand Column (Chapter VI)

Purpose

To increase awareness of unspoken assumptions and thoughts during a group discussion and to develop a forum for discussing those assumptions and thoughts with the group

Basics

Number of participants: Two or more; preferably a small group
Time needed: 10 to 15 minutes to debrief
Room Arrangement: Comfortable space to write
Materials: Piece of paper divided into two columns; writing implements

Process

1. Prior to a team meeting or a small-group discussion, each participant receives a *Left-Hand Column* sheet and the following instructions.

Left-Hand Column *Thought, Concerns, Opinions*	Right-Hand Column *Information Being Discussed*

- The *Left-Hand Column* activity provides individuals with documentation of the topics under discussion (these are listed in right-hand column) as well as their reactions to the topic being discussed (these are listed in left-hand column). The thoughts may reveal some important individual assumptions about the topic or questions related to the meaning of ideas or concepts being discussed.
- In the right-hand column, participants write the important information they heard during the group discussion. This column has the factual information—the ideas that everybody hears.
- In the left-hand column, participants write thoughts or reactions to what was being said or what was happening during the group discussion. They write what they are thinking and feeling. This column documents personal interpretations of what was said. It includes ideas or feelings that are not said aloud to the group.

2. At an appropriate point during the group discussion, the facilitator asks participants to review their *Left-Hand Column* sheet to see what unspoken factors are influencing the discussion. (Factors range from considerations about the subject being discussed—agree, disagree—to interpersonal tension—lack of trust, feelings of inadequacy—to physical needs—hungry, cold. All are legitimate issues for group consideration and often point to roadblocks for successful group functioning.) The facilitator may pose one or more of the following questions:
   - *What were you thinking that you did not say?*
   - *What were you feeling that you did not say?*
   - *How are your thoughts influencing your participation in the group discussion?*
   - *What is an appropriate way to share your thoughts?*
3. The facilitator opens a group discussion about issues surfacing in the left-hand column and about the ways this information can be used to improve understanding of group functioning.

Facilitator Notes:

- An important point to remember is that no opinion is "right" or "true." Reality, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder. Within a group, a variety of views always exists. Sometimes members of a group behave as if one opinion or view is right and another is wrong. The original data or the information in the right-hand column is the most objective information available. The left-hand column illuminates the individual interpretations of the objective data. Those interpretations are what is being discussed in the *Left-Hand Column* exercise. The facilitator will want to keep tying what was said with how it was interpreted.
- *Left-Hand Column* can be adapted for specific topics being discussed to make underlying assumptions more explicit and apparent to the group (see example below).

Left-Hand Column	Right-Hand Column
Why is that quality an early childhood practice?	*A quality early childhood practice*

- On a more interpersonal level, *Left-Hand Column* can be used to help the listeners distinguish between the speaker's comments and their perceptions of the speaker.

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My Thoughts	Speaker's Comments

- Questions the facilitator may pose for reflection:
  - *What was the speaker's intention?*
  - *Did the speaker achieve his/her intention?*
  - *What assumptions am I making about the speaker? Why?*
  - *Did these left-hand column thoughts interfere with communication?*
- Facilitators should be prepared to share a thought from their left-hand column to get the group started.

Source: Senge, P. (1994)

TOOL #8 The Pyramid (Chapter VI)

Purpose

To find common ground and reach consensus among members in a group

Basics

Number of participants: Between 8 and 32 people
Time: 20 to 40 minutes, depending on group size
Room Arrangement: Moveable chairs in an open room (no tables)
Materials: Chart paper and markers

Process

This exercise helps group members converge their ideas around a topic, such as values of the community, staff development goals, or beliefs about how young children learn.

1. Participants write their thoughts or opinions on the topic.
2. Participants then work in pairs comparing their ideas about the topic. The pairs write their consensus about combined or similar ideas.
3. Two sets of partners combine and repeat the process.
4. Two groups of four combine and repeat the process.
5. Two groups of eight combine and repeat the process. Groups continue to combine until there is consensus among all the participants.

What are our beliefs about how young children learn . . .

Individually
With a partner
Two sets of partners
Two groups of four
Two groups of eight

Facilitator Notes

- This activity can be used in smaller team meetings with as few as four people and is a useful tool for developing shared meaning.

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TOOL #9 Ground Rules (Chapter VI)

Purpose

To examine and establish ground rules for team functioning

Basics

Number of participants: A team or small group (4 to 8 people)
Time needed: 20 to 40 minutes
Room Arrangement: Chairs arranged so that participants face one another
Materials: Chart and markers

Process

1. The facilitator introduces the idea of group rules, using a family as an example. "We have all been part of a family. In any family there are certain rules or expectations for what we could or could not do and how we would behave. What were some of the rules or expectations in your family?"

   Most of what we have suggested are rules that helped us work successfully as a family. Just like families, groups or teams in schools have rules or expectations to help the team function smoothly. What are some of the behaviors, both positive and negative, that you have experienced as a team member? (The facilitator writes thoughts on a group rules chart.)

Example

Positive Group Behaviors	Negative Group Behaviors
▮ Come prepared to the meeting	▮ Engage in side conversations
▮ Be on time	▮ Be chronically late to meeting
▮ Accept and make no calls during the meeting	▮ Interrupt

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2. The facilitator initiates a group discussion about the messages that the behaviors in each column send to team members.
3. The facilitator leads the group in a discussion about the value in having agreed-upon ground rules. After reviewing the sample of possible ground rules, each team or group brainstorms "draft" rules for itself and writes them on a chart. Each team member then gets five dots to put beside the five most important rules. The top-ranked four to six rules become the initial set of ground rules.

SAMPLE GROUND RULES

- Start and end on time.
- Participate in no side conversations.
- Minimize interruptions.
- Offer everyone an equal voice.
- Honor promises and commitments.
- Avoid dominating the conversation.
- Listen to understand others.
- Encourage everyone to participate in group work.
- Work from a group developed agenda.
- Rotate team leadership tasks, such as agenda development, meeting facilitation, and recording.

4. After the four to six top choices are identified, the facilitator seeks consensus to accept these ground rules as expectations for the group. The facilitator is looking for 100 percent agreement. If a group member is unable to commit to a particular rule, the group needs to decide if the rule should be eliminated or if an exception can be made on the basis of the member's situation.

FACILITATOR NOTES

- Successful teams have clear, well-defined rules by which they operate. Chapter VI has a rationale for developing and using team ground rules.
- Teams often dislike doing this. They feel it is unnecessary to establish ground rules. Personal stories in which lack of clarity about expectations lead to bad feelings or the demise of a team would help set the scene for this exercise.
- After ground rules have been identified, the facilitator might ask, Which ground rule, if we could follow it 100 percent, would most improve our teaming? Teams identify

one or two rules and brainstorm strategies to put those rules in place. The facilitator reinforces the implemention of ground rules by scheduling time for feedback at the end of each team meeting.

- Establishing rules is only a beginning. Teams should consider their usefulness and effectiveness after each team meeting and revise them as necessary.

TOOL #10 *Communication Patterns* (Chapter VI)

Purpose

To increase awareness of group communication patterns and their effect on group functioning

Basics

Number of participants: Maximum 8 to 10 people
Time needed: 45 minutes
Room Arrangement: Small discussion groups
Materials: Patterns of Communication Observer Frequency Chart

Process

1. A person from each group is chosen to observe the group discussion. The job of the observer is to record the communication patterns within the group and share the recorded data with the group.
2. The observer draws a diagram of where people (circles with names) are sitting prior to the beginning of the discussion. Once the discussion begins, the observer records the number of times the person speaks (tally) and to whom he or she is speaking (an arrow in that person's direction). Interruptions can also be marked with an ✗ in the person's circle and encouraging statements with a ✔. Observations are done in 5-minute intervals, with a 5-minute rest between observations. A 30-minute meeting would yield two observations.

5	First 5 minutes	Get diagram ready. Draw circles and label them with participants' names.
10	Second 5 minutes	Observe.
15	Third 5 minutes	Make a second observation chart.
20	Fourth 5 minutes	Observe.
25-30	Last 10 minutes	Transfer data to chart paper to share with group.

3. After about 30 minutes (or a predetermined amount of time), the observer presents the data to the group, and then the facilitator leads a 10- to 15-minute discussion about the data. Potential discussion questions include the following:

   - *Was this a typical meeting?*
   - *What was the flow of communication within the group—who was speaking to whom?*
   - *What effect did this flow have on the group?*
   - *What changes would you suggest and why?*

(Sample Patterns of Communication form is on page 120.)

FACILITATOR NOTES:

- This tool uses a process observer who may also be the discussion facilitator. The process observer role can be rotated among group members. The process observer records the communication exchanges and then shares the information on the patterns of communication diagram with the group. The facilitator leads the debriefing discussion.

- Difficult topics may emerge, and the facilitator should be prepared to address issues such as
  - one person speaks all the time
  - one person never speaks
  - conversation is directed to one person rather than to all members
  - no one encourages the quieter members to speak

Patterns Of Communication

Observer Frequency Chart

Observer: **Date:**

Event: **Time:**

Instructions:

1. Use one sheet for each 5-minute interval.
2. Label the circles with names of the group members.
3. Make a tally each time a person speaks.
4. Draw an arrow to indicate to whom a person is speaking.
5. When a person is speaking to the entire group, draw arrow to center of the circle.
6. Place an ✗ in member's circle every time he or she interrupts another person.
7. Place a ✔ in member's circle every time he or she encourages a member to participate.

Source: Johnson, D.W., and Johnson, F.P. (1994)

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Glossary

Assumption
A theory or belief that provides a rationale for action. For example, an assumption in early childhood is that young children learn by doing. Based on this assumption, learning environments are designed so that children can be actively engaged with materials and each other.

Capacity building
Developing the human and technological resources within an organization to accomplish its vision and goals.

Charter
An initial documentation, the focus or work of a team. For example, charters for collaborative learning teams might include the team's topic of study, the topic's relationship to the vision of the school, the topic restated in a question, a list of needed resources, and the signature of the administrator.

Collaborative learning model
A school-based or team-based professional development model that promotes collegial inquiry, experimentation, and reflection in areas that are professionally significant to participants and relevant to the vision of the school community.

Collaborative learning process
Interactive learning experiences with two or more people that focus on a topic of interest to the group and contribute to the attainment of the school's vision. The process is cyclical and includes five stages: define, explore, experiment, reflect, and share.

Collaborative learning team
Members of a school community who voluntarily organize themselves into a small group on the basis of their personal interest in the group's topic of study.

Common ground
An idea that resonates among all members of a group; the merging of group opinion around a thought or idea. Common ground is a place of agreement that is reached without forcing or compromising.

Communication norms
Shared expectations about how group members will communicate with each other. Examples of communication norms are listening carefully, sharing relevant information, and developing shared understanding.

Community
A collection of individuals who are organized around relationships and ideas and who choose to come together on the basis of shared purposes, values, ideals, and aspirations.

Consensus
A decision made by a group of individuals where all members perceive they have equal opportunity to influence the decision and everyone agrees to support the decision.

Core ideology
The enduring character or essence of an organization; the articulation of the purpose and values of an organization.

Core purpose
The focus of the organization; its reason for being or existing.

Core value
A central belief deeply understood and shared by every member of the organization. Core values drive the decisions and guide the actions of everyone in the organization.

Current reality
The internal and external forces that impact the functioning of an organization. In a school these forces might include the child population, staff expertise, organizational structure, resources, current initiatives, and school culture.

Facilitator
A person who supports the movement of a collaborative learning team toward mutually agreed-upon goals and encourages the full participation and valuing of all team members.

Game plan
A blueprint or overview of a group's action plan that is developed prior to beginning action and can be adjusted at any point during the action.

Ground rules
Specific and concrete rules and procedures that guide group functioning. Ground rules provide guidelines for team meeting procedures and a code of conduct for team members.

Group functioning
Ability of the group to perform work, which includes (1) achieving its goal, (2) maintaining good working relationships, and (3) adapting to current circumstances in ways that help the group achieve its goals.

Identity
The unique character of an organization that evolves from multiple aspects of the organization including its history, values, purpose, current reality, and vision.

Infrastructure
The means or systems through which an organization makes available resources such as time, money, reward systems, information, management support, and access to colleagues. Alignment should exist between an organization's infrastructure and its purpose, values, and vision.

Interdependence
The perception that one is linked with others in such a way that the success of one depends on the success of others and that the work of each person benefits the whole.

Learning community
Individuals who choose to engage in collaborative learning on the basis of a shared curiosity and a desire to expand their skills and knowledge individually and collectively.

Multiple perspective taking
The ability to see a situation from the point of view of others; the ability to experience the emotional and cognitive reaction of others in a given situation.

Purpose
An organization's reason for being or reason for existing. It is not a goal or a strategy but rather the focus of an organization.

Practice
A strategy or technique that is used to accomplish a specific goal. For example, anecdotal record keeping is an assessment practice, or guided reading is a reading practice.

Process
A method or procedure for doing something; a course of action that oftentimes has multiple steps or stages.

Self-organized groups
Groups formed on the basis of shared goals or interests among group members. In self-organized groups, members self-select to be part of a group.

Shared understanding
Two or more individuals reaching a common interpretation of an idea, task, or problem.

Shared vision
A clear, compelling goal that conveys something concrete, visible, and challenging but "doable." It requires thinking beyond the current capabilities of the organization.

Specific measurable results
A description of a specific outcome associated with the school vision that can be observed and measured.

Topic of study
A body of knowledge, skills, strategies, or models that is both (1) meaningful to a group of educators and (2) relevant to the goals and/or vision of the school.

Tool
An activity that has a specific purpose, a set process, and an anticipated outcome.

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